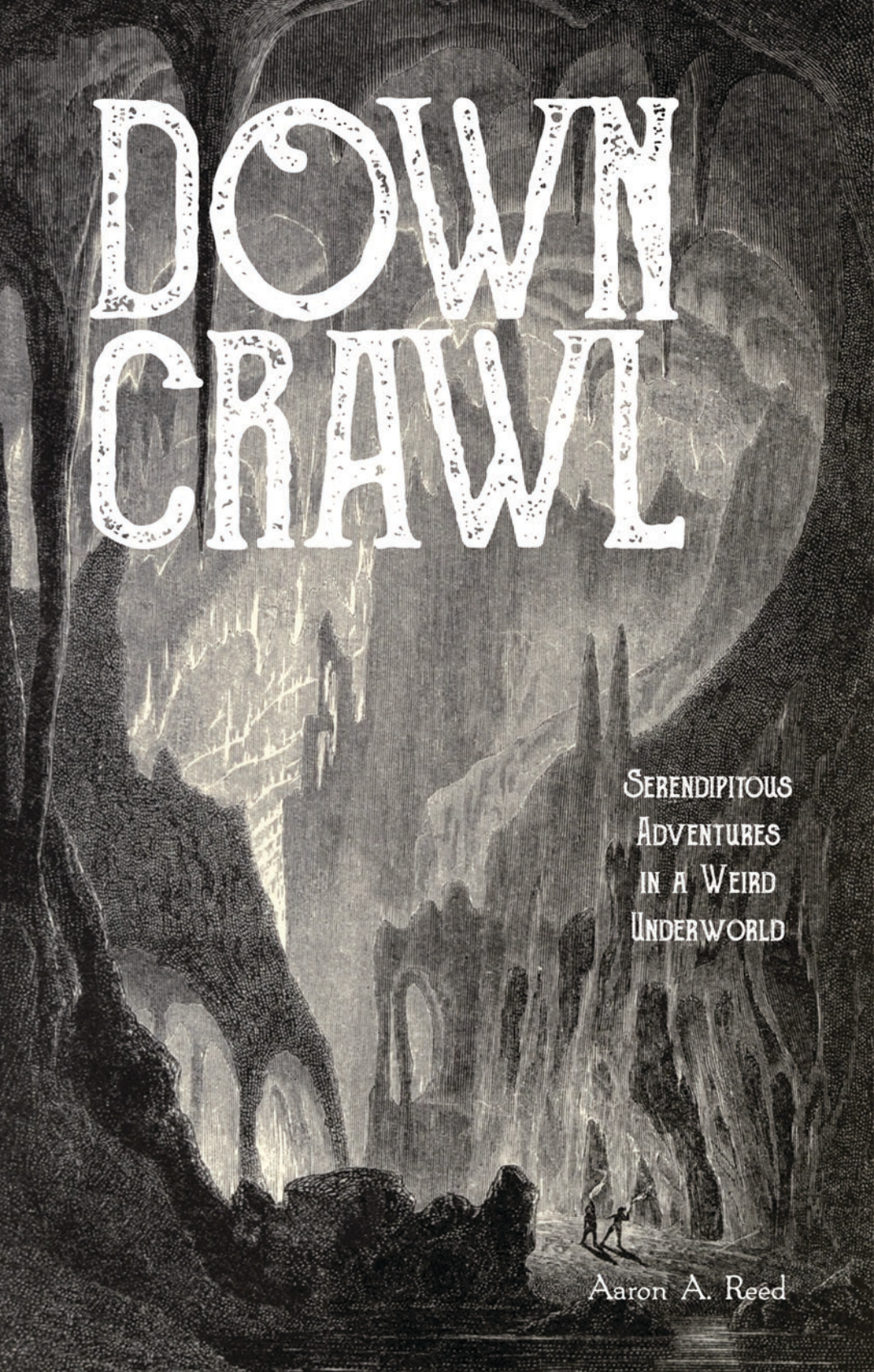




DOWN CRAWL

SERENDIPITOUS
ADVENTURES
IN A WEIRD
UNDERWORLD

Aaron A. Reed

DOWNCRAWL

Aaron A. Reed

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Introduction

Setting Overview

This book will help you run randomly generated, open-ended adventures in a weird and fantastical underworld, a place so far from the surface that the sun and sky are only legends, and so vast that no bounds can be placed on its dimensions or contents. We call this place:

The Deep, Deep Down

...or just *the Down* for short. Here are some of its essential qualities:

I. The Down is vast.

Three-dimensional, unmappable, and more or less infinite, the Down stretches its tunnels and tendrils through all the vast dark spaces of the earth. There is far more Down Here than there is Up There. Navigation is hard, even between familiar

waypoints. Rather than a fixed set of races and enemies, there are a boundless number of cultures, powers, and threats: many beginning but few endings.

2. The Down is challenging.

Food, water, even air may be rarities. Compasses don't work. Routes once wide and navigable might collapse or twist toward new, unstable destinations. There are few completely safe spaces. Tread carefully.

3. The Down is weird.

Think *Alice in Wonderland*. Think *Fallen London*. Think del Toro, Miéville, Gilliam, Peele: Spielberg but also Cronenberg. Think of the consequences of no sun, no soil, no rain, no wind. Think of sentient purple moss reaching scheming tendrils miles through the dark; think of cheerful



skeleton bards, singing legends of stars on fragile lutes; think of antlered children racing through shell-paved streets and giggling, faceless cultists worshipping huge red worms, bottomless chasms with rival universities clinging like limpets to their walls, their telescopes always pointed down into the deep.

4. The Down is isolated.

Unlike more familiar underworlds, the Down doesn't connect to the surface through the lowest level of a dungeon or an everyday cave system—or if it does, finding such a path is a once-in-a-lifetime fluke. A world-spanning quest or freak accident has stranded your characters here: getting back, if even possible, will be a most epic adventure.

The rules of *Downcrawl* help gamemasters generate new adventures in this world and give players tools to explore it. Here's a quick look at some of the system and setting details the book will cover:

The Deep Folk. One might be able to list all the races of intelligent creatures found on the surface, but in the endless depths there are more peoples and cultures than can be counted. Explorers will frequently meet new kinds of people, called Folk, especially at crossroads or watering holes. Much like a certain galaxy far, far away, there's always a weird new somebody ordering drinks at the next cantina.

Volumes and the Map. You'll chart the places you've explored, called Volumes, on a large communal map. Volumes are major destinations: cities, haunted dungeons, shrines to dead gods, hidden universities. Travel between these sparks of light is dangerous and unpredictable. The more routes charted on your map and rumors learned about your destination before

setting out, the easier it is to arrive. An abstract resource called Tack represents orientation while traveling: don't run out or risk getting lost.

Player-Directed Stories. Your journey through the Down is led by the players, whose job is to be active explorers of this weird, wonderful underworld, rather than waiting for the GM to guide them through a pre-ordained plot. The GM's job is to fill the nearby world with interesting details and the distant world with tantalizing suggestions, and listen for what stories the players are most excited about telling.

Fungus. While traveling, characters can forage for useful mushrooms, which provide all manner of benefits (and sometimes strange side effects too). Raw fungus can be sold for a little coin, but watch out for the Fungal Druggists, whose concentrated mycelial tinctures offer powerful benefits and only a small chance of all-consuming addiction.

How to Use This Book

The first part of this book describes the systems of *Downcrawl* which players and GMs will both engage with: travel, rumors, mapmaking, and mushrooms. The rest is targeted at GMs, with instructions for generating volumes, folk, and random encounters, examples of each, notes on running the game, and more details on the setting.

Downcrawl is designed to work alongside your favorite fantasy roleplaying system, rather than being a standalone game itself. A good free system is *The Black Hack* from Gold Piece Publications, but any will do.

The text will frequently give numbers tuned for either **d20** or **2d6** based systems, as a basic calibration point. Note that the random tables make use of the full traditional set of dice: **d4**, **d6**, **d8**, **d10**, **d12**, and **d20**.

Moves and Rolls

Certain recurring situations are presented in the form of Moves (a concept borrowed from *Powered by the Apocalypse*), which offer possible outcomes based on decisions or die rolls. See pg. 8 for an example.

Moves with rolls generally have five possible outcomes: Critical Failure, Complication, Success, Strong Success, and Critical Success.

- The **criticals** should be the lowest or highest possible rolls in your system, ignoring any modifiers: natural **1** or **20** for d20, or natural **2** or **12** for 2d6.

- A **success** means matching or exceeding an appropriate target number in a d20 system (often in the **12-14** range), or a **7+** for 2d6.

- A **Strong Success** means hitting the **target number + 5** in a d20 system, or rolling a **10+** in a 2d6 system.

Bonuses and Penalties. If a situation grants you a Bonus or Penalty, take a **+2** or **-2** to your roll in a d20 system, or **+1** or **-1** modifier in a 2d6 system. For a Double Bonus or Penalty, apply the modifier twice.

Exhaustion. If your system doesn't simulate tiered exhaustion, simply track how many points of it each character has, and take a Penalty to all rolls for each point. At five exhaustion, you're on the verge of death. A full and uninterrupted night's sleep in a safe volume removes one point of exhaustion.

Complications. While it's rare to outright fail, player rolls will frequently involve complications: something unpleasant instead of or in addition to your desired result. Think of it this way: rolling always makes something happen. Success means something happened the way the player expected it to. A complication means something happened in a way they didn't.



Systems

Volumes

In a traditional hexcrawl, the GM makes a map of hexes for the players to explore. Each hex represents an area of fixed size, and if you travel north from one, you can generally return by heading south.

Maps in the Deep, Deep Down are more ephemeral, unstable, and three-dimensional. Instead of a hex, each major region here is called a **Volume**, with no fixed sizes or distances between them. A volume might be a single city, a vast labyrinth with millions of passages, or the lair of a mighty beast and the fearful villages around it. It's a region dominated by a specific influence, be it cultural, geographical, or biological. A volume is generally anchored by at least one resource (a reliable source of food, light, treasure, etc.) and surrounded by trackless subterranean wilderness: unpredictable, unmappable, and wild.

Volumes are linked not by cardinal directions but by shaky and changing routes: perhaps temporary, definitely circuitous. New connections might be discovered and old ones might vanish as the players gather rumors and update the map.

The Map

The players and GM share a public map of all discovered volumes and their current

connections. This should ideally be poster-sized and placed in the center of the gaming table. Players should feel free to add annotations, sketches, and notes. Connections are subject to change and should always be drawn in pencil.

The positioning of volumes on the map is arbitrary, since it's a flat abstraction of a massive three-dimensional labyrinth: just because two volumes are drawn near to each other doesn't mean they're actually physically close, nor that there's easy travel between them. Adjacency is represented by the connecting lines drawn between.

Within a Volume

Volumes are major milestones on your overall journey, destinations you've worked hard to reach. They're places where the characters can rest and recover from a journey, find opportunities to trade and recover Tack, discover and investigate plot threads, and have adventures. Depending on how focused your campaign is on exploration, volumes might be brief pit stops or the sites where the majority of your play time happens.

Though players might learn some information about the world from fellow travelers on the road, it's in populated volumes where they'll have the best opportunity to expand their map. Each player can use the **Update the Map** and **Force the Map** moves (next page) while in a volume, which together simulate much

of the traditional rumor-gathering and information-fishing that happens when arriving in a new area.

Rumors. It's important to keep track of how many Rumors you've learned about each volume. You can write these directly on the map next to the volume's name, or keep track of them separately and add a star or tick mark to the map when you learn a new one.

Tack. Successful journeys through the Down require spending a communal resource called Tack, which represents knowledge begged, borrowed, or stolen about possible routes and hidden pathways. Tack will deplete during a journey as players find tunnels have collapsed, natural or sentient forces have reshaped waypoints, wrong turns are taken, or intel is revealed to be flat-out wrong. Starting a journey with sufficient Tack is vital to arriving safely.

Tack can be collected via the **Update the Map** move, given out by the GM as a story reward, found on journeys during random encounters, or won as a bonus for critical successes on a **Travel Roll** (pg. 12). It can be spent to increase the odds of a successful Travel Roll or to force a detail onto the map, and it's all lost if you crit-fail a Travel roll.

Update the Map

Once per volume, **when you chat up the locals for news and rumors**, gain 1 Tack and choose 2:

» **What's the news?** Collect a useful or interesting Rumor about this volume.

» **Ask for directions.** Get reliable guidance to a well-known destination here (tavern; market; lodgings; etc).

» **What's nearby?** If there are fewer than four adjacent volumes, the GM will add a connection on the map from here to another volume, also adding the volume itself if previously unknown.

» **Ask for stories of far-off lands.** The GM will either add a new disconnected volume to the map, or tell you a Rumor about a random known volume.

» **Ask for route updates.** The GM will add or remove a connection between two volumes on the map.

» **Keep your ears open.** Gain 1 extra Tack and the GM chooses one of these options.

This move is tuned for group sizes of 3-5 players. For 6+ players, choose 1 option instead of 2. For 2 or fewer players, play this move once for the whole party, gaining 6 Tack and choosing 6 options.

Rumors about a volume might include (GM's choice): one of its tags; an abundance or scarcity; its remoteness; folk who might be found there; where to get good food or drink; rumors about the people in charge; its touchstone; an opportunity; or a connection to an ongoing story arc. Rumors are not necessarily accurate.

Force the Map

When you set out to gather more specific information about your surroundings, choose 1, then either pay 1 Tack for an automatic success, or make an appropriate skill check at a difficulty of the GM's choosing and risk failure or complications. You can't roll more than once for the same thing in the same volume.

» **Track down.** Get a lead on where to find a particular concealed resource or person in this volume, if it exists (or a hint about another volume where you'd have better luck).

» **Find a secret route.** Add a connection between a specific volume with at least 3 known Rumors and another volume of the GM's choice.

» **Supply and Demand.** Ask where a particular resource (pg. 36) is abundant or scarce. The GM will tell you a known or newly discovered volume matching your description.

» **Learn about a distant place.** Name a volume other than this one, and the GM will give you a Rumor about it, or explain why you learn nothing new.

» Or choose any **Update the Map** option.

Complications on any kind of information gathering roll generally means someone else has learned something about you which you'd rather they hadn't. It might also mean you learn something that isn't necessarily relevant or true.

Example: after a disastrous attempt to reach an unconnected volume called the Songstorm Rulleys, the players decide to do a bit of Forcing the Map before making a second try. Two players each spend 1 Tack to **Force the Map** with "Learn about a distant place," gathering more Rumors about the Rulleys: in combination with a previously-known Rumor, they now have 3. This lets the third player **Force the Map** again with "Find a secret route." The GM obligingly draws a connection between the Rulleys and a place called the Dribbling Marches. The Rulleys are now **connected**, lowering the next journey target by 1; if the group first travels to the Marches before attempting to reach the Rulleys, they'll also get a bonus for being **adjacent**.

Example: the players are on a do-gooding streak and are looking for places with despotic tyrants who need overthrowing. The paladin decides to **Force the Map** with "Supply and Demand." Tack is tight, so she takes a chance and makes a Gather Information check, but rolls under the target number. Thinking, the GM decides she does indeed learn that the yet-unvisited Empire of Arcadia has a corrupt king named Lord Utter (adding this invented detail to his Guidebook). Unfortunately, Lord Utter has also learned of the party's interest in him.

Journeys

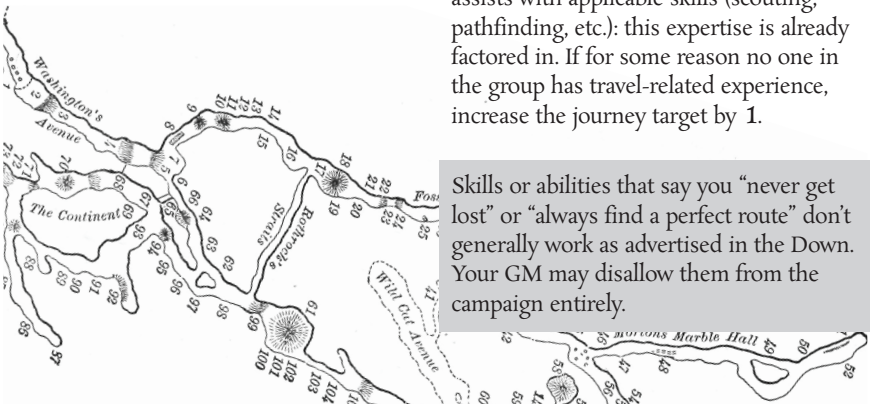
When the party moves from one volume to another, they leave behind one pocket of safety and stability and move into the uncharted depths of the Deep, Deep Down. While volumes are centered around sources of food, light, warmth, or protection, these resources may be scarce in the places between.

Several general rules apply during journeys:

Abstracted Movement. Progress is made by advancing a journey clock, and does not strictly correspond to physical movement in a particular direction.

No True Rest. Characters may not take a long rest, full recovery, or otherwise regain their full strength while traveling between volumes. These interstitial spaces are profoundly unsafe and magically unstable: equilibrium is not easily restored, and you'll need to marshal your resources carefully.

Journey Moves. Journeys are simulated through a series of moves played by the party collectively and the GM. Begin with **Plan Your Journey** (this page) and start each day of travel with **A Day on the Road** (opposite). A description of these moves follows.



Plan Your Journey

When you set out on a journey to another volume:

- ☛ create a **journey clock** which starts at 0.
- ☛ Set the **journey target number** to the Remoteness of your destination (3 for Well-Known, 4 for Sheltered, or 5 for Secretive) and then modify it as follows:

Add 1 if the destination is **not adjacent** to the current volume

Add 1 if the destination is **not connected** to the current volume

Subtract 1 if the destination is unvisited but you've learned at least two Rumors about it

Subtract 1 if you travel with someone who's been there before, **or halve** (round down) if most of the group has been there before

Adjacent means your current and destination volumes have a line between them on the map; **connected** means you can get from one to the other via a series of such connections.

It's assumed the party has at least one competent leader, and that everyone else assists with applicable skills (scouting, pathfinding, etc.): this expertise is already factored in. If for some reason no one in the group has travel-related experience, increase the journey target by 1.

Skills or abilities that say you "never get lost" or "always find a perfect route" don't generally work as advertised in the Down. Your GM may disallow them from the campaign entirely.

Example: the players are trying to reach the legendary Necrosensorus, a place they've heard of but know no direct route to. It's Secretive, so the journey target starts at 5; and since it's neither adjacent nor connected to their starting point, the target jumps up to 7! But they've collected some Rumors about the place, and are traveling with a Shestal scholar who's been there before, which together take the target back down to 5. The group will need 5 Journey On successes to reach the Necrosensorus, quite a difficult journey.

Later, the group is trying to return to their home base in the Addakite Empire, a Sheltered volume (4). Having since discovered a secret route connecting the Necrosensorus to the map, Addakite is connected but not adjacent (5). But everyone's been there before, so the journey target number halves (rounding down) to 2.

And Back Again. It's up to the GM whether or not to fully play out a journey to a previously visited volume. Doing so can provide fun surprises and plays to the theme of an unpredictable underworld, but sometimes it makes more sense to fast-forward to the next chapter.

No Pit Stops. Just because you're traveling between two connected volumes doesn't mean you get to stop at any others on the way. The most direct route between two volumes rarely passes through any known territory. If you want to hit a specific interstitial volume, you need to divide your trip into two smaller journeys.

A Day on the Road

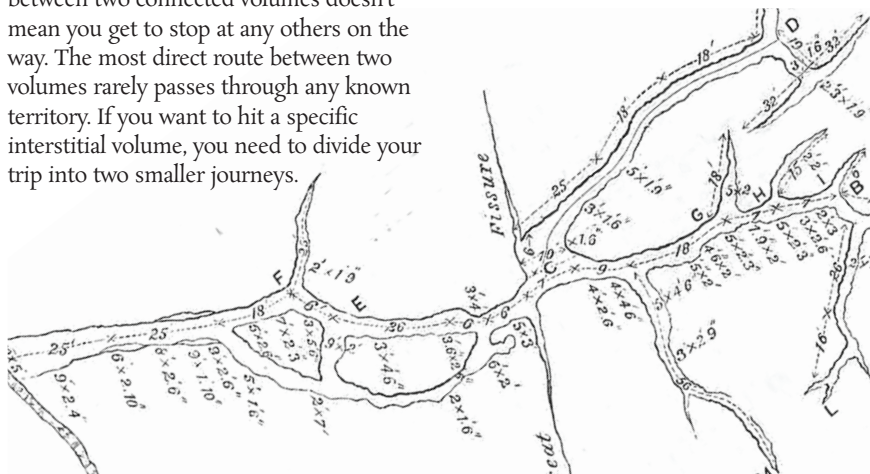
When each day of a journey between volumes begins, ask the GM what terrain you're traveling through (their **Terrain** move, pg. 24), then choose an appropriate move:

- » If your journey counter has reached its target: **Arrive**
- » If you have no Tack: **Lost**
- » Otherwise, one of the following:

- » **Journey On**
- » **Encamp**
- » **Retreat**

After completing the move, if you have not yet reached your destination the GM triggers a **Travel Encounter** (pg. 38). Once this has been resolved, the day's travel is done: return to **A Day on the Road**.

Changing your destination. If you decide mid-journey you don't want to go to your original destination after all, you must play **Retreat** to get back to where you started, then plan a new journey, if you like, from there.



Travel Roll

When a journey move calls for a **Travel Roll**, pick one character to make it, choosing a relevant skill or ability that makes sense as a test of navigation: Orienteering, Survival, Wisdom, or whatever. It's fine if someone else makes the next Travel Roll, and if different characters use different skills to make it.

The GM will tell you the base difficulty for the roll. Calculate additional modifiers as follows:

- » **Bonus** per point of Tack spent
- » **Bonus** if you **Journeyed On** yesterday
- » **Penalty** per roller's Exhaustion points
- » **Penalty** if the party is slowed (carrying heavy goods, traveling with pack animals or dependents, etc.)

Consult the move that asked you to make the Travel Roll for the results.

Tack must be spent **before** you make a Travel roll, and is lost regardless of the outcome (unless a move says otherwise). Note that it's important to hold some Tack in reserve for your final **Arrive** move.

Journey On

When the group decides to push on towards their destination, make a Travel Roll.

Crit: Advance the journey clock by 2: if you've exceeded the target, skip the day's Travel Encounter and immediately **Arrive**.

Strong Success: Advance the journey clock by 1 and choose 1:

- ♣ Gain 1 Tack
- ♣ One PC can act as if **Encamping**

Success: Advance the journey clock by 1.

Complication: Choose 1:

- ♣ Leave the journey clock unchanged and explain why
- ♣ Advance the journey clock by 1 but lose d4 additional Tack
- ♣ Advance the journey clock by 1 but the Travel Roller gains a point of exhaustion, and explains why

Crit Fail: Lose all your Tack and become lost.

Lost

When you begin a travel day without any Tack, you are lost. You no longer have a clear idea of how to either get where you were going or return from whence you came. Make a **Travel Roll**:

Crit: Advance the journey clock by 1 and gain **d4 Tack** (you are no longer lost).

Strong Success: Choose 1:

1. Advance the journey clock by 1
2. **Encamp**, but the Scout option is unavailable
3. **Retreat** (with a new Travel Roll)

Success: Roll **d3**: the party has the option to trigger that Strong Success result.

Complication: Remain lost and choose 1:

- ✦ **Raise the Danger**
- ✦ A player character gains a point of exhaustion: decide who and why

Crit Fail: You remain lost, and everyone gains a point of exhaustion: GM explains why.

You are no longer lost if you gain even 1 Tack, making it a useful reward for GMs to dangle during encounters while lost.

Arrive

When you begin a travel day with a journey clock that meets or exceeds your target, you are arriving... somewhere. Make a final **Travel Roll**, spending as much remaining Tack as you like. If you are lost, however (with no Tack to spend), take a double Penalty to the roll instead.

Crit: Arrive at your destination, and choose 2:

Strong Success: Arrive at your destination, and choose 1:

- ✦ In an advantageous situation
- ✦ Don't lose the Tack you spent on this final roll
- ✦ If your destination was not connected to your origin, add a connection

Success: Arrive at your destination.

Complication: Arrive at a volume adjacent to your destination (GM's choice; possibly newly discovered or connected)

Crit Fail: GM chooses where you arrive (anywhere on or off the map)

Retreat

When the party gives up on a journey and tries to retreat back to the volume they started from, play the **Arrive** move, but for "destination" read as the volume you set out from. You can't Retreat while lost unless a move specifies otherwise.

Encamp

When the party rests up for a day rather than pushing on, no progress is made towards your destination, but you have a chance to heal, reorient, and gather resources. You cannot Encamp while lost (out of Tack) unless a move specifies otherwise.

Each player can **choose one activity** from the Active or Passive Encamp Action tables below. NPCs may choose a Passive action, or assist a PC with their action to grant a Bonus.

Magic-users additionally recover half the spells they'd normally regain from a full rest when Encamping.

Table of Active Encamp Actions

» Each PC chooses one Active or Passive action.

Scout	Make a Travel Roll with no modifiers: on a Strong Success, find 1 Tack
Cover Your Tracks	Make a Travel Roll with no modifiers: on a Strong Success, Lower the Danger (pg. 24)
Forage	See the move opposite

If *Scout* or *Cover Your Tracks* produces no result, describe something strange or beautiful you find in the nearby area, or a conversation you have with someone back at camp.

Table of Passive Encamp Actions

» PCs or NPCs can take Passive actions.

Foraging Training	If both a teacher and a student choose this option, the student gains the Fungal Foraging skill. This is the only way to learn it.
Recuperate	Recover one point of Exhaustion, or remove some other ongoing penalty.
Rest	Regain half the hit points you've lost.
Recharge	Regain any special or "daily" abilities you've expended.
Other	Anything you could normally do in your game system on an off-day (make progress on a crafted item, pray to your gods for a boon, etc.)

Encamping for a single day triggers no encounters. However, on subsequent days at the same campsite, the GM **Raises the Danger** (pg. 24) and Travel Encounters are triggered as normal. In addition, a character can only attempt each Active task once per campsite.

The GM has three moves to play during journeys:

- ♣ **Terrain** (pg. 24)
- ♣ **Raise/Lower Danger** (pg. 24)
- ♣ **Travel Encounters** (pg. 38)

Fungi

Mycelia grow in all conceivable shapes and sizes in the Down, and are used for every conceivable purpose: building material, dyes, clothes, light sources, recreational drugs, and food (though most fungi isn't edible, and some is actively poisonous). Some mushrooms are even intelligent: don't eat those, either. Experienced travelers can learn the careful art of fungal foraging, and gain useful resources for themselves or to sell along the way: with different forms of currency abounding, useful fungi are the closest thing to a stable trade good.

Fungal Foraging is a new skill which characters can learn on journeys from anyone who already knows it. It should begin equivalent to other first-level skills in your system; you can use regular advancement rules to improve it when appropriate.

Foraging

When you spend a day Encamped hunting for mushrooms, and have the Fungal Foraging skill, roll it:

Crit: As Success, but choose an effect (instead of rolling)

Success: Roll on the Table of Fungal Effects (next page)

Failure: Choose 1:

- ❖ Roll for a Fungal Effect, but the fungus you find has only the side effect: describe what it looks like and whether you keep it.
- ❖ The GM makes your Fungal Effects roll in secret; you won't know what your find does until you try it.

Crit Fail: You find something, all right: the GM rolls on the Table of Threats (pg. 41).

Sampling. For an unidentified fungus you didn't forage yourself, any character regardless of skill level can try taking a nibble to guess its primary effects. The GM will provide a vague clue.



Table of Fungal Effects

» Roll **2d20** for the primary effect only of the batch of fungus found (side effects are rolled later).

		Primary Effect	Side Effect (reverse of Primary if blank)
2-3		Roll again twice	
4	\$	Sharpened hearing	Deafness
5	\$\$\$	Become shadowy and hard-to-see; Penalty to being perceived	You glow brightly
6	\$\$\$	Mild precognition: Bonus on reaction checks and can't be surprised	
7	\$\$	Ignore <i>lose all Tack</i> results on your Travel Rolls	Double crit fail range for Travel Rolls
8	\$	Become lighter, as if in one-third normal gravity	
9	\$\$	Rarely need to d4 : eat/drink/breathe/sleep	
10	\$\$	Can smell spores: Double Bonus to Foraging	
11	\$\$	You smell like the Down; Double Penalty to being tracked	
12	\$	Sparkling eyes: Bonus to NPC interactions	50% chance for them to flee in horror
13	\$	Rarely afraid	
14	\$\$	Become 25% d4 : smaller/larger/wider/taller	
15	\$\$	Heightened awareness of detail (Bonus on relevant skill checks)	Hallucinations
16	\$\$	Bonus to a random stat (d6 ; fixed per batch)	
17	\$	Effects of Exhaustion temporarily halved	
18	\$\$	Minor healing	
19	\$\$	+d4 (d20) or +1 (2d6) per Travel roll	
20	\$	Mushrooms: edible, as 1 ration	Terrible nausea: Penalty on all rolls
21	\$	Fungus: when squeezed, intoxicating liquid comes out	...which gets you blackout drunk
22	\$\$	Highly resistant to d4 : fire/cold/poison/magic	
23	\$	Language-learning booster: with 7 doses and study with a native speaker, learn a new language in a week	Become violently allergic to the Fuzz
24	\$	Fall into a deep sleep and get one normal full rest	Nightmares & can't sleep at all: gain 1 Exhaustion
25	\$\$	Recover all spell abilities	Using magic triggers unexpected side effects
26	\$\$	Commanding voice: Bonus to getting people to do what you say	Voice becomes high-pitched and everything is hilarious
27	\$\$	Beserker: Bonus to all combat rolls	Same, but can't resist a fight
28	\$\$	Become repugnant to undead	
29	\$	Sense nearby danger by touching rock	Frequent nosebleeds
30	\$\$	Become loved by d4 : animals/monsters/people/plants	

31	\$\$\$	Major healing	
32	\$\$\$	Grippy-hands: move on walls or ceilings at half speed	Can't walk a straight line
33	\$	Extreme enthusiasm for everything	Lethargy
34	\$	See details at a much greater distance	Blindness
35	\$\$	Speak with mushrooms	Mushrooms <i>won't stop speaking to you</i>
36	\$	Skin changes color based on your emotions, like a mood ring	You only think you can see this happening & are insufferable about it
37	\$\$\$	No effect but highly prized by collectors	As spicy as the spiciest hot pepper
38	\$\$	Your left hand can find secret things	Your left hand is now controlled by the player on your left
39-40		Roll again twice	

When you successfully forage, you find **d4+** doses with the given fungal effect, where the plus means 4's explode: if you roll a 4, you've found **4 + d4+** doses, and so on.

Invent a name for your find, or use the Table of Fungal Names, and keep track of the batches you've found.

Dollar signs indicate approximate selling price per dose. \$ = a drink or meal; \$\$ = a minor potion or small gem; \$\$\$ = a good weapon or nice scroll; \$\$\$\$ = a trained mount.

Effects last around 24 hours, except where noted.

Table of Fungal Names

» Pick a word from the left column and a word from the right.

green	truffles
honey	morels
purple	buttons
blood	ladies
jellied	ettinheads
mud	trumpets
slime	coral
prickly	stalks
black	chanterelles
crunchy	cups
sweet	angels
bitter	tufts
milky	boys
spongy	puffballs
frilly	stinkhorns
shaggy	sludge
white	coils
glowing	toadstools
shrieking	caps
giant	pfifferlings

Side Effects

When you ingest the first dose of a batch of fungus, roll **2d6**. For each **1**, roll again on the Table of Fungal Effects for a side effect. If none is listed, reverse the row's primary effect: bonuses become penalties, healing becomes damage, and so on. The side effects of a batch should be marked down along with the its primary effect. Side effects also last around 24 hours, unless you rolled snake eyes, in which case both effects last until you can get that looked at by a professional.

You must suffer through the side effects on the first dose of a batch. Subsequently, you can choose to make a saving throw to avoid them. You lose the chance to save if under the influence of multiple fungi at once.

Selling Fungi

A batch or two of unwanted fungi can be sold to an interested buyer for the listed price. If the current volume has a relevant abundance or scarcity, though, that might bump the price up or down. Sellers can often negotiate an improved price if they give an accurate report of the batch's side effects.

Except for mushrations and fungwring, which are sold everywhere, vending fungi in larger quantities is a much dicier proposition. The druggist guilds (see next section) exert a tight control on markets throughout the Down, and come after unlicensed peddlers distributing what they deem "dangerous, raw, untested, unrefined" mushrooms. The real danger, naturally, is not giving them a cut. If you find a rare seller willing to risk deadly guild reprisals, roll three times on the Fungal Results table to see what's for sale, and increase the listed price by one \$.

The Fungal Druggists

Distilling fungi into more potent medicines (or, let's be clear: drugs) is among the Down's most widespread and lucrative economic engines. The druggist guilds have monopolized sales of processed fungi, and their chapters are nearly everywhere: any community of decent size has at least one vendor, regardless of local laws on the matter.

While wild mushrooms are found at random, drugs with specific effects can be purchased, and at greater potency. Users, however, take on a random and unknown risk of addiction.

Buying drugs works like foraging for raw fungi, with the following exceptions:

- ✦ Customers of a druggist may request a specific entry from the Fungal Effects table, either a primary or side effect.
- ✦ The given effect is doubled in potency.
- ✦ **d4+** doses are available, at the listed price plus one \$.
- ✦ Invent a name and intake method for the batch (intake examples: ingestion, inhalation, skin contact, held under tongue, brewed into tea-potions, etc.)
- ✦ Drugs have no additional side effects, however...
- ✦ The GM rolls **d20** in secret to determine the batch's addictiveness.

Addiction

Any time a drug from a particular batch is used, roll percentile. The GM says whether the roll is under the batch's secret Addictiveness number (between 1 and 20). If it is, you have become addicted to this particular Fungal Effect.

An addict needs to feel this effect each day, or suffer...

Addiction Consequences

When you miss a daily dose of a fungal effect you're addicted to, make a saving throw. If you fail, gain a point of exhaustion.

When you reach a new level of exhaustion from your addiction for the first time, record a new Addict Behavior on your character sheet and explain how it manifests.

Ideas: *an obsession, a compulsion, a fear, a physical tic, an antisocial behavior, a waning interest or relationship, altered perceptions, a loss of focus or passion*

When you fail (or complicate) a roll because of addiction exhaustion, ask someone else to choose 1:

- They say which of your Addict Behaviors caused you to fumble, and how it hampers you.
- They help you succeed anyway, at a cost to them of their own choosing.

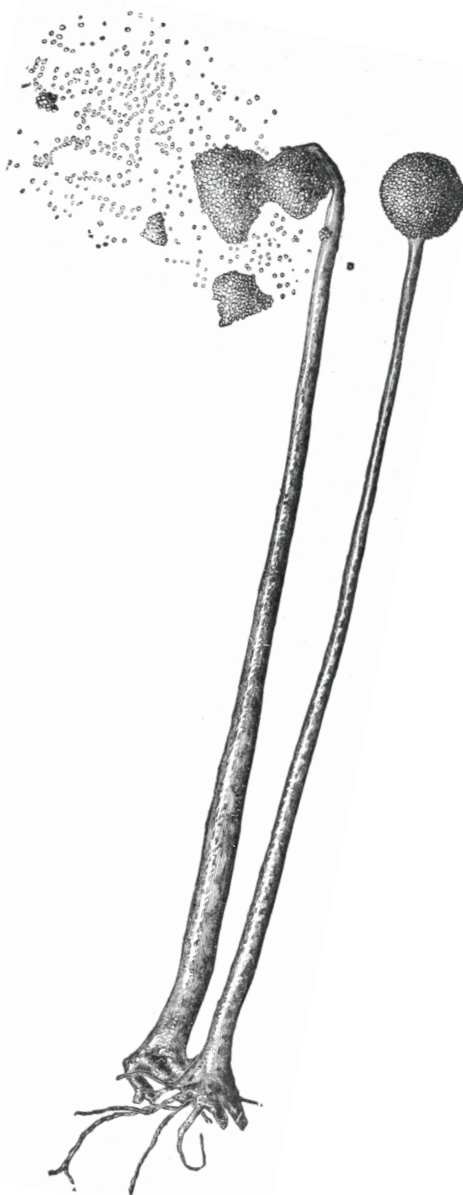
Taking a dose of any drug or fungus with an effect you're addicted to immediately recovers all exhaustion gained via any method.

If your addiction pushes you to six points of exhaustion, instead of dying you break the addiction and no longer need this fungal effect. You remain exhausted, but can now recover via normal means (losing one exhaustion point per day of rest).

Addiction can't be cured by normal healing. It requires something special in the fiction, or at the very least a visit to a druggist who will happily overcharge you for a special Detox drug (itself with its own secret Addictiveness number).

Poison

Drugs intended for other people still offer a risk of addiction to the preparer each time they are deployed: the effects of partial skin contact can be just as seductive as ingestion.



Running Dnecrawl

Starting a Campaign

Dnecrawl can work as a standalone campaign, or as a new challenge in an existing one. Here are some tips for getting started.

No Perfect Navigation Abilities. Many roleplaying games have easily accessible abilities (first-level spells or racial/class features) that eliminate common surface concerns like getting lost or navigating through wilderness successfully. The journey mechanics assume a world without such abilities, so you're encouraged to house rule them away or make them much more limited in scope. For ongoing campaigns, allow any players who already have such skills to retrain with something new, so they don't feel put out.

You might also consider eliminating abilities that summon food or drink, sidestep poisons or disease, remove the need for rest, or allow understanding all languages, to increase the weirdness of the Down and make journeys more challenging.

Getting There. Some ideas for how surface characters might have gotten to the Down, either as a campaign transition or backstory just before the game begins:



Table of Campaign Origins

» Roll **d10** or pick one.

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Scientific spelunking expedition got seriously lost |
| 2 | Upset the wrong wizard |
| 3 | Fell into bottomless chasm on lowest dungeon level |
| 4 | Enslaved by evil Folk |
| 5 | Ship sucked into mile-wide whirlpool |
| 6 | Teleportation stone struck by lightning just as you touched it |
| 7 | Those gnomes <i>could</i> build a lava submarine; didn't stop to think if they <i>should</i> |
| 8 | Earthquake drops favorite tavern into giant crack, spills your ale |
| 9 | Oops: sailed off the edge of the world |
| 10 | You just wake up down there, a strange glowing symbol on each wrist |
-

Prep

Before the First Session. To prepare a *Downcrawl* campaign, first do these things:

- ♣ **Create a couple Folk** to seed your world. Grab some from the examples on pg. 49, or use the Folk Generator found on pg. 26.
- ♣ **Create the initial Volume** the players will start in: you'll probably want to hand-craft this based on the particulars of how your characters have arrived.
- ♣ **Add a handful of additional Volumes** to seed your Guidebook, using examples starting on pg. 50 or the Volume Generator found on pg. 31.
- ♣ **Decide on structure:** do you want to set up an overall campaign goal for the players (see pg. 25), or let them define their own goals and metrics for success?

The First Session. A good way to start is to put the characters in a small, hand-crafted volume with an immediate challenge to solve (escaping from prison, surviving a flood, etc.). Introduce the Map moves (pg. 8) so they can start gathering information. Once they're ready to strike out into the Down, explain the journey rules (pg. 10).

Between Sessions

Create new volumes, especially if your Guidebook is running low on undiscovered places. You always want more Deep, Deep Down ready, especially in response to Map moves.

You might also want to dream up a new Folk or two, especially if the players are headed toward a new area.

Keep in mind what the players were most excited by last session, and what they seem to be most looking forward to. Are there cool items or abilities they haven't gotten to use in a while? Is it time for them to get a new magic weapon?

Think about unfinished business and ongoing story threads you want to keep active, and some appropriate nudges for each, which might take the form of Opportunities in local volumes. Think about whether the party's actions in the last session might have caused changes in the world, and update your notes accordingly. Brainstorm a new monster or two. If the party has been hanging out in the same volume for a while, make a few new Opportunities for it, or sketch out a new NPC or location.

Keep an open mind and let player interests guide your prep.

The Map and Guidebook

While it may seem to players like the **Update** and **Force the Map** moves are revealing pieces of some great hidden atlas, in fact the map gets made up as you go along. The player's map is the GM's map. You might have unknown volumes in your Guidebook which they haven't heard of yet, but connections between volumes aren't predetermined: they only come into existence when players ask questions about the world.

Player Map Moves

Force the Map (pg. 9) gives players a lot of power, and that's fine. It's a way for them to tell you what they want to happen next. You don't always need to give them what they want right away—note that several options allow for some waffling—but don't ignore this channel of communication, either.

If you enjoy giving your players even more creative input, try deflecting a Map question onto another player. Give someone else a chance to invent a far-off place name, rumor, or local point of interest. Add what they say to your Guidebook and flesh it out further as you go, or between sessions. This can be a great source of interesting new ideas and helps get players more invested in the storytelling.

When adding or removing connections in response to Map moves, aim to create constellations: clusters of connected but isolated volumes. This maximizes the impact of connections (creating distinctions between destinations that are adjacent, connected, and unconnected), thereby providing incentives to discover new routes and link up distant places.

It's important for GMs to realize that once a volume is known (on the map), the players can try to go there. You can make it a harder trip by never giving out Rumors about it, not connecting it to other volumes, and not introducing NPCs who've been there before. But none of these actually prevents an attempt to journey there.

If you *really* don't want them to go somewhere yet, put the volume in a different Region (see pg. 24) or don't reveal its name (in which case players might write down notes about it, but can't actually add it to the map).

Alternatively, maybe the players can get to the volume but not to all the places within it: they don't have the right key, social clout, combat skills, or whatever. Make sure the players understand they might not be prepared before they waste a journey.

Tack

Players are generally wise to start a journey with at least 5-7 Tack, more if the trip will be especially hard (although it's fine if you want to let them learn this by trial and error). In addition to gaining Tack from Update the Map moves, feel free to give it out as an occasional reward, both within a volume and during journeys, and especially when they learn something useful or interesting about the world. 1 Tack is a good standard reward; give 2 or 3 for special occasions.

The party loses all Tack if they crit miss on a Travel Roll, and are incentivized to spend any remaining at the end of a journey to bolster their Arrival, so you shouldn't have to worry about stockpiling.

You generally won't need to invent new ways to deplete Tack, but losing some might be an appropriate consequence for

particular story developments (the players learn they've gotten bad intel, something's made navigation between volumes more difficult, and so on).

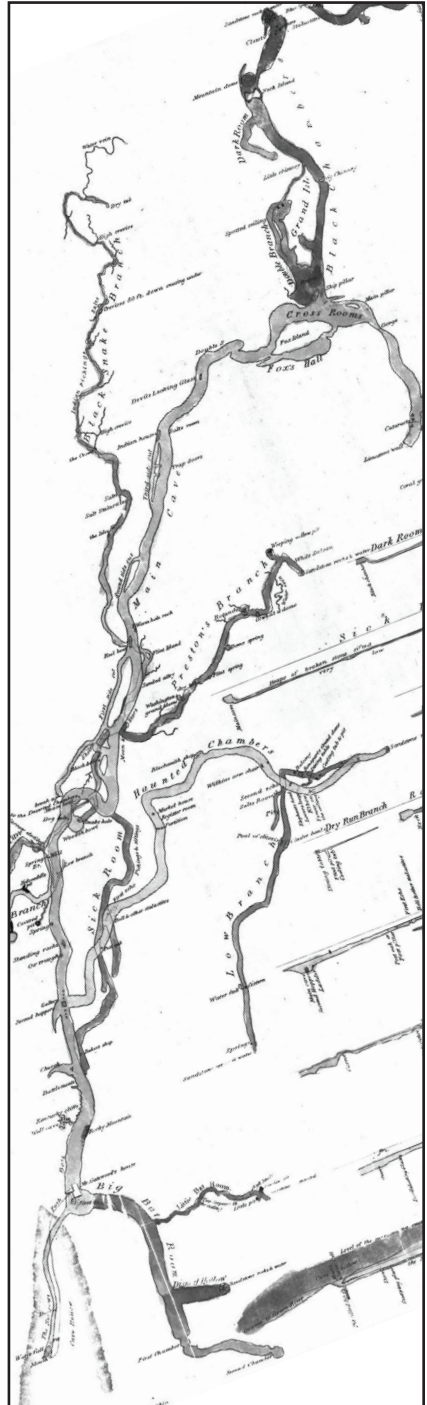
Journeys

Travel Rolls should be set up such that characters will succeed a bit over half the time (with this perhaps getting somewhat easier as they level up). For a d20 system, that might mean a target number of **12** (assuming a relevant first-level skill check at **+4**). For a 2d6 system, a Travel roll should pretty much always be at **+1** for a ranger-like character before situational modifiers: much higher than this and journeys become too predictable.

Tip: While your players are deciding what travel move to play, calculating their Journey On modifiers, and deciding how much Tack to spend, roll up the day's Encounter so you'll have it ready to go.

Remember that players can't recover their full equilibrium while on a journey: no long rests, full recoveries, or whatever your system's equivalent is for "reset to 100%." You want the characters entering into situations with their resources somewhat depleted and feeling precarious. Remind magic-users running out of options, though, that Encamp will recharge half their spells.

Sometimes, players might want to return later to a place created for a random encounter on a journey. The best way to handle this is to promote that location to Volume status and add it to your Guidebook, connecting it to the origin and destination of the journey it was discovered on.



GM Travel Moves

Raise or Lower the Danger

When the players move into a more dangerous area, make foolish decisions that increase their risk, or aren't being threatened or challenged, increase danger by one level, up to a max of +2. Say how they are being stalked, chased, or threatened. Apply this modifier to the top die in all initial Encounter rolls, and to rolls on the Table of Terrain Consequences.

» Standard: +0 (No Modifier)

» Threatening: +1

» Dangerous: +2

When the players move into safer terrain, make smart decisions that increase their chances of survival, or are at risk of being overwhelmed, lower danger by one level, down to a min of +0. Say how the risk has been reduced.

Terrain

When the players begin a day of travel, describe a new detail about the current terrain, or roll on the Terrain Table (pg. 34) and describe how they transition to this new terrain type during their day's journey.

Optional Rule: Also roll on the Table of Terrain Consequences for a temporary effect that applies to this day's journey. Add the Danger to this roll.

Table of Terrain Consequences

» Roll **d10** and add the Danger.

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1 | Familiar: Bonuses from spent Tack are doubled |
| 2 | Easy-going: Bonus on Travel Rolls |
| 3 | Safe Haven: Bonus on rolls while Encamped |
| 4-5 | No consequence |
| 6 | One-Way: Can't Retreat |
| 7 | Exposed: Can't Encamp |
| 8 | Difficult: Penalty on Travel Rolls |
| 9 | Maze: Can't spend Tack on rolls |
| 10+ | Dangerous: During Travel Rolls, any Opportunity becomes a Threat. |

For Travel Encounters, see pg. 38.

Regions

If your map's getting cluttered, or you'd like to move a long-running campaign forward into a new act, you can introduce a new Region.

- Each region has its own map.
- Rules about moving between volumes only apply to those within the same region.
- The party can only enter a different region through a special Border Volume that connects a volume in one region to a volume in another. (This means traveling between regions will always take at least two journeys.) Consider making customized Border volumes, rather than randomly generating them, so they feel like important transition points in the overall story.

Campaign Arcs

It's fine to run *Downcrawl* as a pure randomized hexcrawl. Recurring story threads and large-scale goals will naturally emerge from the way your players interact with the people, encounters, and places you create. If you want to set up an overall direction for the campaign, however, here are some ideas.

Going Up

Getting back home to the Surface is the most obvious goal, but it won't be easy. Have the party pass through several Regions before nearing their destination, following leads and red herrings all the way. The passage can't be easy, or more would have found it. Some final boundary will doubtless take truly heroic effort to cross.

Going Down

Or maybe the players want to find out what's at The Bottom: the center of the world? The final turtle? An infinite fire, the land of a trillion demons? Or even the End of All Rock, a vastness stretching down into a black broken only by distant twinkling lights? All or none of these legends might be true. Reaching the Bottom should be as difficult as reaching the Top.

The Ultimate Treasure

Somewhere down here, a legendary treasure lies buried. Maybe seeking it is how the group ended up in the Down in the first place. It should be no ordinary horde, but something truly epic: the secret library of a lost empire, the artifact that can save the world, the remnants of creation. Others will surely be seeking it too.

The Ultimate Villain

Something sleeps deep beneath the earth, and if it wakes It Will Be Bad. Its lair is well-hidden, and will take many clues and journeys to uncover. Its home volume may be surrounded by others in thrall to it, in terror of it, or fighting a hopeless battle to keep it contained. Gathering what's needed to keep it asleep or subdued, or defeat it, if the worst comes, will be epic undertakings.

Far From Home

This is a good option if you want to make a group of characters who are natives of the Down setting out for its most distant corners. Perhaps they've heard tales of a far-off land unlike anything they've ever seen. Maybe they aim to create an impossible atlas, or just travel farther than anyone has before. Their journey might take them through several Regions, each introducing a new unexpected and pervasive strangeness.

Generators

Creating Folk

The GM keeps a catalogue of each Folk thus far invented, called, naturally, the Folk Lore. For a new campaign, seed this with at least four Folk, either chosen from the examples on pg. 49 or randomly generated with the method below. Create one or two more Folk between each session.

Your Folk Lore will never stop growing: there are always more strange cultures and creatures waiting to be met. Eventually, you'll have a whole palette of weird and interesting peoples inhabiting your underworld.

I. Basic Concept

Each Folk is seeded by two ideas. To generate each:

1. Roll on the Table of Folk Ideas (opposite) for a verb.
2. Roll on the Table of Folk Idea Connections (this page) to see where to get a noun.
3. Depending on that result, roll on the given table or choose from the given list for the noun.

Once you have two ideas that intrigue you, summarize them in a sentence or two and move on.

Table of Folk Idea Connections

» Roll d4.

- 1 a Terrain (pg. 34)
 - 2 a Resource (pg. 36)
 - 3 a Volume (in your Guidebook)
 - 4 another Folk (from your Folklore)
-

Example: The GM rolls d20 and d10 on the Table of Folk Ideas for a starting concept, and gets a 9 and a 5 (odd) for the result "Searching for the perfect..." Next, they roll d4 on the Table of Folk Idea Connections and get 1: a Terrain. Flipping to the Table of Terrains, they roll d100 and get 67: Underground Sea. The first core idea for this folk is that they are searching the Down for the perfect underwater ocean.

Next, the GM rolls d20 and d10 again and gets 18 and 2: "Code of conduct based around..." Since this result provides its own subject, they roll d4 directly to get 2: "Truth." The second idea for this folk is that they have a code of conduct based around absolute truths. That's two ideas, so the GM's ready to move on to step 2.

Table of Folk Ideas

» Roll **d20** and any other die; use the second die to pick the odd or even column.

	Odd	Even
1	Experts	Strange relationship
2	Worship	Conceptual opposite
3	Love	Trade for/with
4	Need	Hate
5	Hunt for/in	Disgusted by
6	Protect	Perfected survival in/with
7	Create	Destroy
8	Known for	Can't come near
9	Searching for the perfect	Were once almost destroyed by
10	Evolved to live in/with	Exiled from/by
11	Rarely venture far from	Escaping
12	Their legends speak of a great	Feel superior to
13	Mental/mystical connection to	Parasites of
14	Want to improve	Only once in their lives do they approach
15	Symbolic affinity	Extremists
16	Love/Hate relationship	Exploit
<i>For these results, roll connection here instead of via the Table of Folk Idea Connections</i>		
17	Made of d4 : Machinery, a Primal Element, Hybrid Parts, Dead Pieces	Great makers in the domain of d6 : War, Work, Food, Infrastructure, Textiles, Art
18	Navel-gazing, devoted to their own d4 : Minds, Bodies, Beliefs, Works	Code of conduct based around d4 : Honor, Truth, Aesthetics, Economics
19	Gender, d8 : One, Performative, Three, Changeable, Private, Unimportant, Unequal, Complex	Roll again for how they relate to d6 : Music, Performance, Sculpture, Painting, Stories, Architecture
20	Reproduction, d4 : Egg-laying, Mitosis, Recruitment, Rare	Language based on d4 : Light, Subsonics, Smell, Movement

2. Appearance

Roll twice on the Table of Folk Appearances (selecting a parenthetical option, if any), and let the results inspire a basic look. You can loosely interpret or discard anything you don't like, but be open to radical ideas.

Most results might be interpreted in many different ways. "Bones and rot" and "Heat and flames" could mean zombies with burning eyes, or a folk who paint their bodies with a vibrant red-orange paint that smells like death.

Rolls with seemingly contradictory results are the best, because they let you stretch your creativity. Got both *huge* and *tiny*? Maybe these folk are huge for snails, but tiny for people. Maybe they have huge eyes but tiny teeth. Maybe they're tiny in reality but use latent mental powers to loom large in the minds of others. Go wild.

Table of Folk Appearances

» Roll **d20** and **any other die**; use the second die to pick the odd or even column.

	Odd	Even
1	Huge	Large
2	Small	Tiny
3	Arms (<i>none, many, long, tentacles</i>)	Nose (<i>beak, trunk, sensitive, none</i>)
4	Legs (<i>one, four, many, long, multi-jointed</i>)	Face (<i>kindly, distorted, more than one, none</i>)
5	Eyes (<i>strange, enchanted, many, one</i>)	Sounds (<i>noisy, silent, captivating, painful</i>)
6	Head (<i>enlarged, unusually positioned, multiple, none</i>)	Smells (<i>overpowering, sweet, distinctive, mimicry</i>)
7	Hair (<i>strange, styled, lots, none</i>)	Shadows and translucence
8	Stone and earth	Heat and flames
9	Gills and scales	Claws and teeth
10	Sleek and muscled	Antlers or horns



	<i>Odd</i>	<i>Even</i>
11	Gears and machinery	Moss and fungus
12	Wings or feathers	Humps and pouches
13	Hybrids and mutants	Snouts and tails
14	Bones and rot	Squishy or gelatinous
15	Twins or packs	Whiskered or bearded
16	Shells or spines	Colorful
17	Simple costume (<i>rags, monochrome, practical, none</i>)	Elaborate costume (<i>robes, silks, battle gear, ceremonial</i>)
18	Need costume to survive (<i>rebreather, armored suit, wheeled tank, magic helm</i>)	Movement (<i>graceful, clumsy, unusual, infrequent</i>)
19	Memories (<i>short, long, specific, strange</i>)	Insensate (<i>blind, color-blind, deaf, only hear high/low frequencies</i>)
20	Mercurial (<i>shapeshifters, illusionists, planewalkers, masked</i>)	Magic (<i>potent in, sustained by, withered from, immune to</i>)

3. Reputation

Roll twice on the Table of Reputations to learn how these Folk are seen by others. Again, you can loosely interpret or discard anything you don't like, but be open to radical ideas.

Reputation is the way others would describe these folk in a word or two. This is a kind of stereotype, and should be treated as such: a broad generalization at best, slander at worst. Perhaps a folk deliberately chooses to be seen this way to hide a deeper truth, or perhaps only some outsiders think of them like this while others think the opposite. Individuals might have as much or little relation to this as a specific human does to a statement like "All humans are arrogant." Make reputation a starting point, not a complete characterization.

4. Name

If you haven't yet, give these folk a name. You can use online fantasy name generators, or find an etymological dictionary and look up real archaic words relating to the folk's core concepts, but I like to use a quicker method:

✦ Write down the first and most obvious thing that comes to mind. Spider-folk that live in cold caves? Maybe *Ice Spiders* or *Cold Crawlers*. If you like what you wrote, just go with it: it'll be easy for both you and your players to remember.

✦ If you don't like what you wrote, rearrange the letters until you find a few syllables that sound fantastical and interesting. From the letters in "Ice Spiders" you could get *Sedri*, *Pradic*, *Redisps*, or *Driss*. Adjust spelling and style as necessary (*The Ridisps*, *Spiders of Driss*, *the Lost Sedrians*).

Table of Reputations

» Roll **d20** and **any other die**; use the **second die** to pick the **odd** or **even** column.

	Odd	Even
1	Powerful	Lazy
2	Mysterious	Cheerful
3	Pushovers	Inconsequential
4	Respected	Superstitious
5	Power-hungry	Industrious
6	Fallen	Religious
7	Doomed	Violent
8	Unpredictable	Clumsy
9	Reliable	Scary
10	Ingenious	Gross
11	Tastemakers	Boring
12	Found everywhere	Destined for greatness
13	Poor	Kindly
14	Ridiculous	Stupid
15	Pitiable	Introspective
16	Dour	Unforgivable
17	Uncivilized	Socially invisible
18	Revered	Religious
19	Untrustworthy	Scatterbrained
20	Decadent	Curious

Creating Volumes

Volumes are the stages for your ongoing story, places of wonder and possibility worthy of journeying towards and spending time in. The next few pages will help you generate these special places: except the process to take from twenty minutes to an hour per volume, depending on how fast inspiration strikes and how much fleshing out you want to do.

Keep all created volumes together in a physical or digital Guidebook, and update it when new information is invented or discovered. A volume is *unknown* if the players have never heard of it: as soon as they have, it gets added to the map and becomes *known*, even if it has no connections yet to other volumes.

You'll probably create more volumes than the players will ever actually see. This is a good thing: hints dropped about distant places go a long way toward making the Down feel huge and endless. An embarrassment of riches in your Guidebook also keeps you from railroading players toward one or two precious destinations.

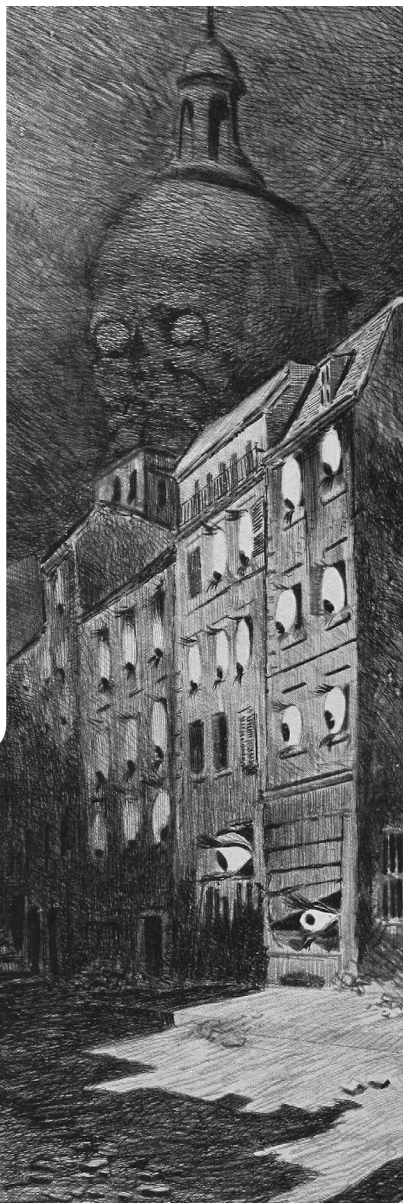


Table of Volume Themes

» Roll 2d8 and read as two numbers, from top to bottom as the dice fell.

1-1	Anarchy	5-1	Mecca
1-2	War Zone	5-2	Lap of Luxury
1-3	Rebellion	5-3	Poverty
1-4	Colony	5-4	Kingdom
1-5	In Decline	5-5	Empire
1-6	Booming	5-6	Gears and mechanisms
1-7	Cultural Upheaval	5-7	Rare Resource
1-8	Radical Lifestyle	5-8	Necropolis
2-1	Failed State	6-1	Great City
2-2	Second Chance	6-2	Scattered Holdfasts
2-3	Exiles	6-3	Lazy Villages
2-4	Isolationist	6-4	Rival Forces
2-5	Forbidden Knowledge	6-5	Dictator
2-6	Impending Doom	6-6	Decadent
2-7	Melting Pot	6-7	Library
2-8	Quarantined	6-8	Prison
3-1	Rare Magic	7-1	Crusaders
3-2	Barely Contained Magic	7-2	Monster City
3-3	Ruined by Magic	7-3	Weird City
3-4	University	7-4	Legendary
3-5	Lair	7-5	Crossroads
3-6	Monumental Project	7-6	Grand Market
3-7	Profoundly Weird	7-7	Utopia
3-8	Last Bastion	7-8	Mining Operation
4-1	Trading Post	8-1	Holy Site
4-2	Wasteland	8-2	Repugnant
For results below, also roll d4: Ruled by, Famous for, Hostile to, Unusual			
4-3	Mages	8-3	Artists
4-4	Farmers	8-4	Undead
4-5	Elementals	8-5	Sages
4-6	Merchants	8-6	Warriors
4-7	Nomads	8-7	Hunters
4-8	Priests	8-8	Makers

I. Determine volume themes

Skip this step if you already have a concept for the volume in mind (say, a pitch-black prison fortress). Otherwise, roll twice on the Table of Volume Themes.

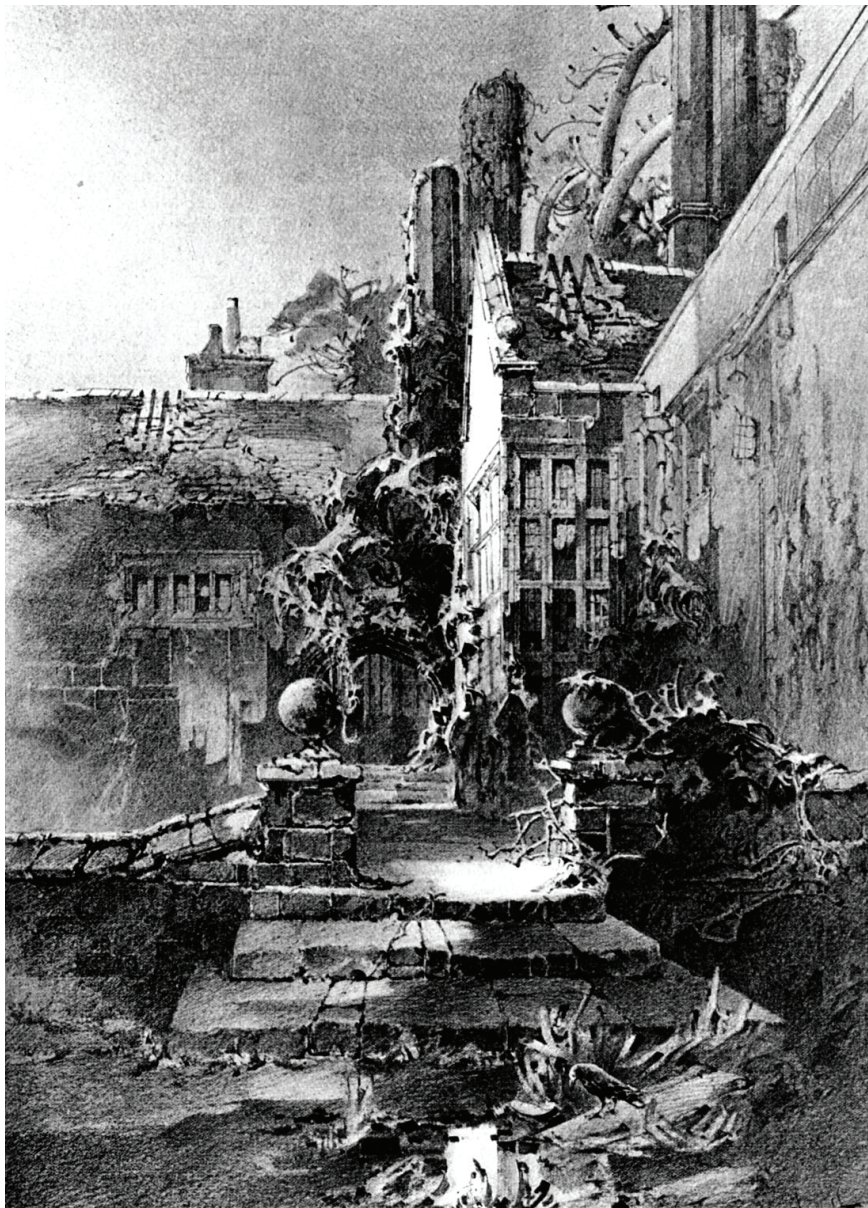


Table of Terrains

» Roll **d100**. If your number is 60 or under, get a second word by either reading straight across, or rolling again, swapping digits or rerolling for a result under 60.

1-2	Obsidian	Galleries
3-4	Granite	Cliffs
5-6	Winding	Road
7-8	Fractured	Badlands
9-10	Deep	Trench
11-12	Narrow	Labyrinth
13-14	Spacious	Passages
15-16	Vertical	Junction
17-18	Steep	Causeways
19-20	Flooded	Caverns
21-22	Dripping	Mines
23-24	Muddy	Riverbed
25-26	Sandy	Plains
27-28	Crumbling	Crypts
29-30	Sulfur	Vents
31-32	Ice	Caves
33-34	Misty	Warrens
35-36	Marshy	Meadows
37-38	Artificial	Shafts
39-40	Crystal	Jumble
41-42	Gem-studded	Grottos
43-44	Endless	Ruins
45-46	Fungus-choked	Crawlways
47-48	Lava	Wasteland
49-50	Noxious	Tunnels
51-52	Giant's	Halls
53-54	Jagged	Canyons
55-56	Ashen	Shore
57-58	Steaming	Chasms
59-60	Haunted	Maze

2. Determine Volume Terrain

Next, roll twice on the Table of Terrains to establish the general environs of this volume.

61	Wormcasts	81	Enchanted
62	Lava Tubes	82	Cavern Network
63	Vertical Rivers	83	Vast Chamber
64	Suspended over dropoff	84	Geysers
65	Edge	85	Sand Dunes
66	River System	86	Antimagic Zone
67	Underground Sea	87	Veins of Ore
68	Magical Darkness	88	Mushroom Forest
69	Flowing Magma	89	Rushing Wind
70	Wildlife Refuge	90	Spider Burrows
71	Flowstone Wonderland	91	Salt Mines
72	Ooze	92	Island
73	Roots of the Earthtree	93	Ancient Battlefield
74	Fungal Jungle	94	Railroad
75	Sandstone Arches	95	Ossuary
76	Boulder Fields and Scree	96	Nesting Grounds
77	Massive Pillars	97	Hunting Grounds
78	Seismically Unstable	98	Hot Springs
79	Twisted	99	Migration Route
80	Mostly Underwater	00	Strange Physics (gravity, motion, time, etc.)

3. Basic Sketch

Let the ideas prompted by your theme and terrain rolls percolate for a minute. Try to reconcile them together into a coherent whole. Once you've got the spark of an idea, write it down in a sketch of a couple sentences.

Example: Rolling "Decadent" and "Weird City" from the volume theme table, and "Island" and "Narrow Galleries" from the terrain table, you might start seeing a city on an island in the center of a vast underground lake. Maybe it's tightly packed, a cube of crushed-together streets and alleyways, and filled with wealthy urbanites obsessed with some decadent pleasure—gourmands, say. Maybe the city is famous for its ruinously expensive restaurants, where the most delicious fungus in the world is served. There's your sketch.

4. Give it a name

It's okay to be obvious: "The Icy Caverns" is fine. If you want to punch it up, troll through your dictionary or thesaurus, especially for synonyms marked "obscure" or "archaic" ("The Rime Grottos," or "The Burrows of Frigid Winds").

5. Decide what's abundant and scarce

Based on your sketch:

- **choose** one resource from the Table of Resource Types that's abundant in this volume, and one that's scarce.
- Then **roll** twice more, and assign one result as a second Abundance, and the other as a second Scarcity.

Flesh out the Abundances and Scarcities with a few clarifying notes, if necessary, and add or remove others if the fiction suggests.

Table of Resource Types

» Roll **d20** + **d10**.

2	Privacy
3	Fuzz
4	Harmless Animals
5	Leaders
6	Buildings
7	Defenses
8	Skilled Labor
9	Tack
10	Food
11	Magic
12	Useful Animals
13	Trade
14	Wealth
15	Light
16	Monsters
17	Fungus
18	Water
19	Heat
20	Drugs
21	People
22	Religion
23	Safety
24	Community
25	Art/Culture
26	Patience
27	Medicine/Healing
28	Air
29	Open space
30	Knowledge

6. Inhabitants

Choose two peoples from your Folk Lore that are commonly found here:

- one Folk the players have encountered before
- one Folk they haven't

For your earliest volumes, of course, they'll both necessarily be new.

What is the relationship in this volume between these two peoples: friendship, subjugation, indifference, uneasy alliance? How do the residents of this volume differ from each Folk's default norms and reputations?

Alternatively, perhaps this volume is a true melting pot where folk of all kinds can be found, an isolated monoculture where outsiders are rare, or a lonely place with few or no inhabitants.

7. Remoteness

Decide how difficult this volume is to find. This might be implied by the fiction, or you can roll d3:

1. **Well-Known**
base 3 difficulty to reach
2. **Sheltered**
base 4 difficulty to reach
3. **Secret**
base 5 difficulty to reach

8. Create a Touchstone

Each volume has a touchstone, something massively strange and massively wonderful. It might be the coolest thing in the volume, something representative of the place as a whole, the obvious reason for its existence, or something hidden. But it's definitely something the party will hear about and maybe interact with during

their visit. Give the touchstone a short description (a sentence or two).

The touchstone should grow from the ideas you've created so far in your volume, so there's not a table for it: but here's a few nudges to spark your imagination.

palace, tavern, library, dungeon, festival, university, tower, fortress, curiosity shoppe, ossuary, avenue, speakeasy, specialty market, zoo, monument, haunted battlefield, queen, art gallery, secret garden, arena, exclusive club, salon, bookshop, vista, town square, park, grove, clock, factory, machine, wonder of the Down, map, castle, immortal, pier, ride, train, wall, theater, circus, tomb, portal, pit, temple, graveyard, mystery, competition, phenomenon

9. Make Opportunities

Pulling from everything created so far, come up with 3-5 intriguing opportunities here. These might be events the party can't help but get involved in, NPCs with interesting problems or offers, places that demand exploration, or dangers waiting to be unleashed.

Opportunities are story hooks to offer players as they explore the volume. You can develop them in advance as much or as little as you like, depending on how much you enjoy improvising on the fly. I like to keep them open-ended, writing a sentence or two for each, and maybe an NPC name and core concept if I think I might need it.

Here are a couple techniques for brainstorming opportunities:

- Take anything you might find in your story world and imagine a surprising juxtaposition or reversal of a key quality. A tiny dragon; a kindly vampire; a glowing teacup; a frozen fountain; unspendable money; permeable rock. Now think about why

something like this might exist in this volume, and where it would be found.

✦ Think of something threatening or dangerous inherent in or attracted to this volume. Lava caverns might have flame-wolves and the ruthless guild who hunts them; magical darkness might hide echolocating monsters, a guild of blind thieves, or dangerous pits. How might such dangers make themselves known to the party?

✦ Brainstorm something weird or wonderful that could only happen in this unique place. Worm breeders might have worm races; a place known for its toys must surely have a great festival to unveil them; and in a temple of shadow, the lighting of a lamp might be an ultimate blasphemy. When and where does (or could) this unique thing happen, and how might the players get invited or involved?

10. Finishing Touches

Add any final notes to your Guidebook, and update other notes like your Folk Lore if you invented anything new along the way. That's it: your volume's ready to be added to the map the next time the players hear news about the world.

Think of your stock of created volumes like a palette of colors you can use to respond to the way the players direct the story. Have you created a mystic library? If the players find themselves in need of a scholar or a translation, drop rumors of a new route opening up to it and give them some Tack. Action trailing off? Have a threat from an unvisited volume attack them and leave a clue as to its origins. If the players have a half-dozen unvisited place-names on their map they're dying to get to, you're doing things right.

Encounters

Within volumes, tailor encounters to the ongoing storyline and plot threads you or the players want to develop. But during journeys, play the **Travel Encounter** move each travel day.

Travel Encounter

When the players have resolved their journey rolls for a day's travel, roll 3d6 and read the dice from top to bottom.

The top die sets the general tenor of the encounter. Add the Danger modifier (if any) to this die only.

1-2: Opportunity

3: No Encounter

4-5: Challenge

6+: Threat

Opportunities and Threats are fairly straightforward rewards or setbacks the players might encounter. Use the middle and bottom dice of your 3d6 roll to get a specific result on the Opportunity or Threat tables (next page). Depending on your preferences and desired pacing, you can either roleplay these out as full encounters, or present them in a straightforward summary (maybe giving players a single die roll to claim or avoid them).

If the terrain or other circumstances don't give you an idea for a context in which to present the result, you can make a second roll and consult the Table of Challenge Contexts (pg. 42).

A **Challenge** is a more complex encounter with potential for both danger and reward.

The players might reap either or both depending on how they approach the situation.

When you roll a Challenge:

- Use the middle and bottom dice to get a box from the Table of Challenge Contexts (pg. 42).
- Pick a result that you like from the options in the box (avoiding ones you've picked before).
- Now, roll 3d6 again. The top die indicates a category on the Table of Opportunities, and the bottom die a category on the Table of Threats. These indicate what potential reward and danger are present, depending on how players resolve the situation presented in the challenge. Feel free to modify the opportunity or threat if the fiction suggests something more relevant.

It's always up to the GM whether an encounter includes a threat of combat. Create your own campaign-appropriate random monster table if you like, or hand-pick something from your arsenal that makes sense given the terrain and context.

Okay, fine: if you want a purely random result, include combat whenever the middle die of your 3d6 roll is odd.

GM Tip: To save yourself some rolling during encounters, you can have each player roll one d6 and ask them to call out their numbers as you need them, starting on your left and going around.

Example: the GM rolls 3d6 and gets, from top to bottom, 4, 2, 1. The 4 indicates a Challenge. Looking up 2-1 on the Table of Challenge Contexts, "Blind albino birds" seems cool. Another 3d6: 3, 1, 5. The middle die is odd, so combat is a

possibility. Applying the top 3 on the Table of Opportunities results in a potential reward of Tack; the bottom 5 on the Table of Threats signals a danger threatening HP. After thinking for a moment, the GM describes a cavern filled with savage white birds pecking at an enormous decaying tapestry which seems to be a map of the area. Depending on how the players approach the situation, they might have to fight off the vicious birds, be able to orient themselves using the map, or both.

Example: After a day traveling through a crystalline maze, the GM rolls for an Encounter: 5, 2, 4. The GM has previously Raised the Danger to Threatening (+1) so the 5 becomes a 6: a Threat. 2-4 on the Threats table is Threaten Shelter - Already Occupied. The GM describes a perfect campsite squatted by a band of suspicious thugs—the players won't be able to Encamp the next day unless they want to try negotiating with or evicting them.

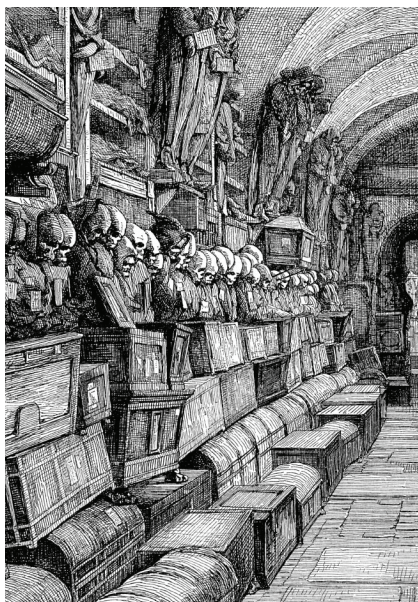


Table of Opportunities

» *Something the players can get without too much trouble, either for free or with an easy skill check.*
Use the **upper d6** for category and **lower d6** for subcategory; parentheses for inspiration.

I - Treasure

- 1 Currency from the origin volume
- 2 Currency from the destination
- 3 A rare or common resource in the origin or destination
- 4 Merchant (*snack vendor, fungus seller, drug dealer, bookseller, weaponsmith*)
- 5 Magic item (*weapon, armor, ring, wand, potion*)
- 6 Valuables (*artwork, useful tools, trade goods*)

2 - Shelter

- 1-2 Bonus to Encamp rolls the next day
- 3-4 As 1-2, and roll again on this table for something found here
- 5-6 As 1-2, but already occupied (negotiation may be in order)

3 - Tack

- 1-2 Find 1 Tack (*abandoned railway, map scrawled on wall, travelers with directions, tracks, signpost, ancient parchment, landmark, sudden memory, funny feeling*)
- 3-4 Find 2 Tack
- 5-6 Find 3 Tack

4 - Information

- 1-2 Roll again for the next encounter and save the result: the players learn a useful or interesting piece of foreshadowing about it
- 3 Roll for tomorrow's terrain: if the players act to prepare, give them a Bonus on relevant rolls made the next day
- 4 Connection to a plot thread in the overall campaign story
- 5 Useful or interesting Rumor about their destination
- 6 Useful or interesting Rumor about somewhere else

5 - Resources

- 1 Healing (*potion, naturally beneficial springs, vein of magic, traveling cleric*)
- 2 Magic (*regenerating pool, scroll, spellbook, restorative runes*)
- 3 Good meal: remove 1 Exhaustion
- 4 Tokens of safety: **Lower the Danger** (pg. 24)
- 5 Allies (*potential followers, fans, old friends, kindly wanderers*)
- 6 Fungus (roll on Table of Fungal Effects, pg. 16)

6 - Environment

The terrain the players are passing through is especially beautiful, weird, or memorable: give them an awe-inspiring description.
(Words: *intricate, prismatic, exquisite, stunning, dazzling, jagged, marvelous, wonderland, alarming, breathtaking, daunting, formidable, fantastic, echoing, striking, splendor, majestic*)

Table of Threats

» When appropriate, let players make a saving throw or other hard check to avoid. Use **upper d6** for category and **lower d6** for subcategory; parentheticals for inspiration.

I - Threaten Treasure

- 1 Currency (toll, tax collectors, coin-eating fiends, gambling den, muggers)
- 2 Rot (mushrooms, documents, rations, books/scrolls)
- 3 Theft (critters, cutpurse, "friendly" travelers, just gone)
- 4 Cursed (whispers, phylactery, undroppable, obsession, "has that always been glowing?")
- 5 Devalued (traveling appraiser, economic reform, illusion, oversaturated markets)
- 6 Charity (good cause, desperate family, traveling circus, ally in need, magic wishing well)

2 - Threaten Shelter (can't Encamp) 3 - Exhaustion

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-3 Rough region (slippery, ghoul-infested, sulfur vent, cave ants, awful noise) 4-5 Already occupied (monsters, lepers, game hunters, nuns, tourists) 6 Can't stop moving (rising water/lava, swarm, piercing wind, demons, army) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1-3 Treacherous terrain (mud, steep, sharp, drop-off, ooze, water) 4-5 Bad air (disease, allergic, extreme temperature, coal dust.) 6 Food rotten or stolen |
|--|---|

4 - Threaten Companions (reroll if none)

- 1 Illness (bad water/food/air, pox, shivers, detox, plague)
- 2 Redshirted (one wrong step, thing in the shadows, got lost)
- 3 Change of heart (betrayal, homesick, identity crisis, news from home, better offer)
- 4 Usefulness (growing fear, lazy, overexcited, careless, clumsy)
- 5 Captured (slavers, spiders, love interest, ransom, Stockholm, mind control)
- 6 Injury (old trap, weapon mishap, blinded, needs a rest day, comatose, must be carried)

5 - Threaten HP (a fight, and/or)

- 1 Dangerous environment (sharp rocks, scorching fumes, crumbling ledge, fire)
- 2 Ancient trap (pits, blades, sparks, flames, crushing)
- 3 Swarm (insects, rodents, lizards, elementals, animated objects, dead things)
- 4 Nature's fury (folk-eating plants, strangling vines, thorns, oozing acid)
- 5 Accident (crumbling tunnel, frayed rope, one wrong step, "not that door!")
- 6 Damage from a distance (snipers, falling stalactites, electrical discharge, magic gone haywire)

6 - Threaten Tack (lose d3, or one per failed player saving throw)

- 1 Confusing terrain (maze, mirrors, monotonous tunnels, twisty passages)
- 2 Accident (wrong turn, map upside down, missed junction, second-guessing)
- 3 Forced off-course (chased, rockslide, bridge collapses, flash flood)
- 4 Missing piece (map smudged, notes lost, directions wrong, landmark missing)
- 5 Bad intel (false sign, con artists, confused vacationers, map's plain wrong)
- 6 Re-route (caved-in, bricked-over, infestation, bad magic, flooded, mudslide)

Table of Challenge Contexts

» Use your **middle** and **bottom d6** to get a box, then choose one option.

I-1

- Undead guardians of an ancient bier
- Every inch covered in historic carvings
- Crumbling bridge over hazard
- Excited costumed travelers en route to major festival; completely, utterly lost

I-2

- Traveling performers
- Ancient battlefield, 1000s of skeletons
- Cocky sword-for-hire, looking for new employment
- Ornate, long-abandoned railroad cars

I-3

- Grotto, six thrones, locked chest
- Slippery stairs
- Traveler's waystation built into natural feature
- Dusty gearwork fortune-telling machine: first one is free and demonstrably true

I-4

- Area filled with dense mist; can't see more than a few feet ahead
- Way overgrown with thousands of tiny, sweet-smelling blue-green mushrooms
- Dead End
- Burrow of adorable, wounded animal with hungry cubs

I-5

- Caravan of suspicious travelers
- Massive rubbish pile, some city's garbage chute: salvage and scavengers
- Sump ahead filled with flammable, unbreathable orange mist
- Abandoned, crumbling village; no bodies; only one thing the looters missed

I-6

- Stand-off between opposing forces; a diplomat is needed
- Chokepoint ahead: signs of ambush
- Chambers draped in curtains of black felt, swaying in unfelt winds
- Wild beast

2-1

- Thousands of unbound pages litter the ground, fragments of an immense epic
- Fifty-foot gap in the path with a hazard in between
- Blind albino birds
- Panicked wanderers fleeing a swarm of ordinary insects, but like, millions of 'em

2-2

- Starving, lost teenager
- Huge rotating sphere, players must slip inside when entrance lines up
- A difficult vertical climb
- Wizard's tower built into natural feature

2-3

- Hospital for terminally cursed patients, staffed by silent Formic Nuns
- Lair; owner is annoyed by whatever's transpiring here
- Abandoned carnival
- Dripping acid ooze

2-4

- Way ahead increasingly cluttered with webs; way back riddled with hidey-holes
- A vein of a precious mineral
- Massive obsidian rod emitting constant spears of lightning
- Path joins with what looks suspiciously like a racetrack; distant rumbling begins

2-5

- Tunnels constrict till you can barely wriggle through
- Crack oozing bright orange goo with a fungal effect at drug strength; ownership contested
- Opulent funicular, donation box, twenty-minute ride, windows painted black
- Mysterious, ancient book, alone on a jade plinth

2-6

- Walls broken by glittering crystals, razor-sharp
- Slippery slope of butterscotch flowstone
- Small, cheerful homestead; everyone inside is very recently dead
- Astonishing viewpoint

3-I

- Eight-sided pillar, 1000 feet high: same declaration of principles carved in 8000 languages
- Settlers with a busted cart
- Seemingly abandoned military outpost
- Sinkhole with increasingly sloping sides

3-2

- Tendrils of Fuzz converge at an oasis of warmth and light
- Devil's Breath Zipline, three miles long: safe, probably
- Path becomes wide level roadway, suspiciously well-lit and maintained;
- Ticking clock until a hazard becomes a real problem

3-3

- Automated ooze farm
- Enslaved rock-creatures digging a tunnel; master is away, for now
- Desecrated tomb
- A far-off, ominously blinking light

3-4

- Hunter stalking a (possibly imaginary) predator
- Hurricane winds rush through choke-point between zones of different pressure
- Deep blue pool blocks the path, something sparkling at the bottom
- Stampede!

3-5

- Boulder-hops across a zone of hazards
- Immaculately detailed miniature city, 200 feet wide; shame if combat here
- Lair of sleeping monsters
- Something is wrong with the gravity

3-6

- "Rain" courses down from stalactites above, soaking everything
- Earthquake!
- Something is stalking from the shadows
- Ancient ship from the surface, wedged in a crevasse

4-1

- Sealed-off bunker with “warning: magical contamination” signs
- Slope of loose gravel and boulders, delicately balanced
- Grandma Ebb’s Megapede Farm: expensive, but -1 to journey target if everyone buys a megapede mount
- Dusty, pompous court of a room-sized kingdom, population three

4-2

- Zealous religious crusaders want converts, won’t take no for an answer
- Swaying catwalks
- Grove of enchanted mushrooms
- Lava flow erupts through the walls

4-3

- Long, straight passage with no side exits
- Fallen road sign; two groups of travelers arguing over which way it should point
- A tiny trading post
- Toll bridge over a hazard

4-4

- Lonely mushroom farmer, will make trades for good stories
- Sprung pit trap
- A sealed tomb and its eternal guardians
- Cheerful traveling portrait artist, gleaming teeth; people in the portraits are all screaming

4-5

- Gear-room of an enormous clock keeping an unfamiliar time, still working
- Pilgrims on a holy quest
- A dead or dying traveler
- Way forward narrows; single-file only

4-6

- Lighthouse, beacon shining brightly; no obvious purpose
- Refugees from a far-off war need an escort to safety
- Path scales a massive chain, each link a hundred feet long
- Plucky girl collecting funds to resurrect dead grandpa, who she has in a cart

5-1

- Ceiling lit by thousands of glowing dots of fungus
- Path climbs the torso of forgotten hero’s colossal statue
- A cube of magical darkness
- Medical emergency

5-2

- Slide down a long, oozing shaft
- Huge out-of-control automaton
- Someone studying an old ruin needs assistance translating some glyphs
- Competing ferry boats

5-3

- Inn hosting a bardic competition
- Ancient coliseum
- Ducking under ceiling with razor-sharp stalactites
- Two mute children

5-4

- Dripping sign: “Flash Flood Warning”
- Vast hollow sphere, floating light in exact center
- A winding stair
- A gallery of eight huge statues

5-5

- Old man in a deep pit needs help
- Magic mirror shows what you most want
- Friendly gelatinous cube, speaks through half-dissolved body's mouth; wants to be an adventurer
- Heavily armored inspectors need to check the party for Blight

5-6

- Wagon of slaves and slavers under siege by freedom fighters
- Discarded, enormous sculptures
- Strange animal pinned by collapsed rock
- Pile of treasure in center of route, obviously a trap

6-I

- Rope across hazard to precarious reward
- Former enemy of the party, claims to be reformed
- Happy family of four living in large glass terrarium; beg you not to break the seal
- Would-be bandits attacked by their enraged mount

6-2

- Gallery filled with hundreds of crude statues of same party member
- Sleeping leviathan with dungeon inside
- Way ahead blocked by rubble, might be possible to clear
- Muddy footprints suddenly vanish

6-3

- Enormous mural has vital clue about history of this area
- A dormant campaign plot thread is resurrected
- Two aged knights claim one always lies and other always tells the truth, but they're just having you on
- Way ahead choked by tall spindly plants with closed, vibrating buds

6-4

- Mini-dungeon: filled with traps, pressure plates, and weighted plinths
- Thieving bat-things stealing your stuff
- Dust-choked gallery, enormous orrery
- Huge monster, way too powerful: run!

6-5

- Travelers seem to have died peacefully in their sleep, leaving their mounts behind
- Ancient glyphs might be a warning about the way forward; can anyone read them?
- A conclave of tiny spore-fairies, barely large enough to see
- An automaton lies in pieces, along with assembly instructions

6-6

- An unexpected hazard for the terrain (i.e., fire in an ice maze)
- Be absolutely silent, or you'll wake The Creatures
- Slippery floor
- The troll demanding a toll is actually a softie

NPC Generator

When you need a spur-of-the-moment NPC, choose which Folk they are, then roll on the...

Table of Quick n' Dirty NPCs

» Roll 2d20 and read as two numbers. Use the first d20 for Affect, the second for Desire.. Pick an option from each entry.

Affect		Desire	
1	tall or short	1	to work or hire
2	rich or poor	2	to help or be healed
3	armored or defenseless	3	to entertain or be amused
4	eccentric or no-nonsense	4	to convert or be convinced
5	noble or working-class	5	to buy or sell
6	overconfident or afraid	6	to con or swindle
7	young or old	7	conversation or to be left alone
8	quick-talking or languorous	8	to complain or listen
9	thin or voluptuous	9	to send or receive a message
10	polite or short-tempered	10	to fight or make peace
11	earnest or sarcastic	11	to do the impossible, or ask it
12	inquisitive or set in their ways	12	to improve their station or disguise it
13	suspicious or naïve	13	to get revenge or make peace
14	desperate or paranoid	14	to defend or rescue
15	drunk or judgmental	15	a new romance or the end of an old
16	well-spoken or dim-witted	16	to catch or escape
17	social outcast or butterfly	17	to forget or be remembered
18	creepy or comforting	18	fame or anonymity
19	religious or rakish garb	19	to guide or be led
20	rare hair or eye color	20	to find or get rid of



An NPC's *Desire* is usually what they want from the party right now, but to spice things up, roll **d6** and interpret it as 1: a long-term goal, 2: something someone else wants that they're involved in, 3: a lie to cover up or distract from something, 4: something they are clearly ambivalent about, 5: they have a very strange way of finding it, 6: they're selling it as a service.

Examples

Example Folk

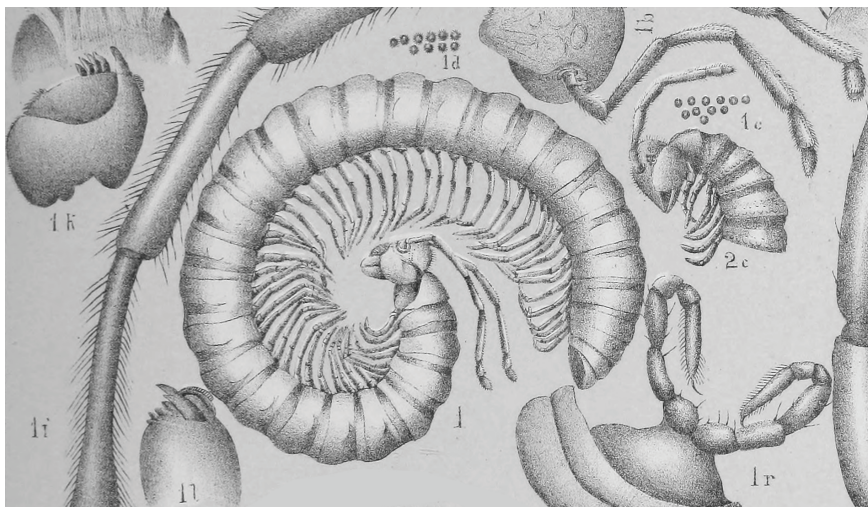
The Catanae. Skeleton wanderers, a dead race brought back by a whimsical god. They love life and music and paint their bones fantastic colors. Every ten years is their glorious festival, the Ebon Fantastic, where their souls swirl together: some new Catanae are born, others return to eternal sleep.

The Chitter. Insectoid constructs, creepy but polite, many ceremonial rituals. They graft parts of living creatures to themselves, which they believe gives them a soul. Can be extremely persistent if they find a part they like, even if still attached to someone else.

Spear-singers. Graceful, with long flowing red hair or beards. Carry huge, beautifully carven spears that whistle in complex harmonies when thrown. Believe in honor, love, and self-immolation by age 35.

Marblekin. Pearlescent giants, crystalline-eyed, dour-faced. Patrons of the arts. Rarely show emotion, which can make them seem cruel or callous. Very long memories. Grow larger the older they get, or perhaps it's older the larger they get?

Elltin. Short, skittish folk terrified of water, always seeking higher ground. Believe in a mythical folk called the Dessicators who are destined to save them. Wear great colorful shells on their backs which they withdraw into if frightened or bored.



The Shestal. Slow-moving, gray potato-bug folk. Cluster near sources of heat. Immune to Fuzz-based linguistic telepathy, they communicate only in slow clicks and whirs, and have rich philosophical and poetic traditions that few others are patient enough to learn about.

The Serimange. Fourteen-legged spider-things that tower over normal-sized folk. Have no faces but are fascinated by them and sometimes steal them. Up to something.

Dvungan's Folk. Half mushroom, half humpbacked dwarves: stout and spongy. Huge umbrella-like heads are hard mottled armor on top, delicate gills rippling with iridescent colors beneath. Speak in booming subsonic rumbles. Doughty soldiers, but often on the wrong side of wars and thus unloved. On a perpetual crusade to destroy something half-real, half-metaphorical called the Strangling Roots of the Alltree.

Stilrunners. Graceful on long, long legs, rarely speaking, wreathed in pale mist that leaks from their skin, they are the respected but pitied remnants of a fallen people who once did great things, but now merely wander and observe.

Flinj. Tall, graceful deer-folk, walking upright. The antlered bucks are gruff but kind homemakers; does are svelte crafters and hunters, suspicious and cunning.

Pesh. Gnome-sized rock folk with rough-hewn features. Can shape solid stone in their hands like clay, and merge into cavern walls when they sleep. Keen planners and administrators, often in positions of power.

The Legacy of Ur-Seraph. Straight-backed sovereigns with ornate, flowing gowns and glittering regalia, each occupying a terribly important position in an ancient and byzantine monarchy in perpetual diaspora.

Never without at least a half-dozen servile Klinnel underlings.

Klinnel. Gray-skinned stick people, kneecap-high, relentlessly friendly, bound as servitors to the Legacy of Ur-Seraph who treat them as beneath notice. Seem to know an awful lot about everything. Almost suspiciously friendly, really. Some say it's the Ur-Seraph who are really in thrall to them.

Lesser Flell. Nimble floating gasbags filled with purple-blue luminescence, trailing long, translucent, deadly fronds. Worship the Shestal with a deep religious fervor for reasons unclear to outsiders. Pacifists unless provoked. Can project shifting, hypnotic illusions of light to distract or hypnotize.

Lime Lillen. Delicate creatures with flowstone hair and epicene eyes. Devoted to the painfully slow sculpting of cave formations via carefully directing the flow of water and minerals, drop by drop and grain by grain. This takes thousands of years: plans are passed down through generations. The results are breathtaking artworks of curved and interwoven stone, fractal patterns and impossible textures to make even a jaded soul weep.

The Etiádlo. Bestial warriors with magma for blood and huge, smoldering horns. Paint intricate war-prayers on their thick, mottled skin. Attack with enormous, red-hot halberds. Revered by warrior cultures as a divine epitome of their craft. Five genders with complex interlocking social structures: most obvious to outsiders is that each specializes in a different fighting style.

Half-lobsterkin? In general, the answer to the question of whether folk can interbreed should be yes, if it makes a good story.

Example Volumes

Here are four Volumes you can use for inspiration, to seed your Guidebook, or if you're ever caught without an unvisited volume prepared. The results from the tables in the Volume Generator (pg. 31) are shown to demonstrate how these random elements were incorporated into the final description.

Bone Falls

Themes: **Booming, Famous for Nomads**
 Terrain: **Vertical River, Ossuary**
 Abundant: **People, Water**
 Scarce: **Open Space, Heat**
 Remoteness: **Well-known**
 Currency: **skeleton keys**

Amidst the constant thunder of a massive waterfall that stretches out of knowledge both up and down, Bone Falls is a place no one can call home for long. New arrivals are welcomed and given a mist-wet, sturdy shack, nestled among the sprawling array of catwalks, ladders, and moss-covered platforms that make up the settlement. But they're also given a strict warning: by inviolable custom, none may reside here longer than a single year. Despite this restriction, the town is booming, expanding up and down the falls like wildfire, with a growing reputation as a place for those who need a fresh start or temporary respite.

Life here is not without danger. All types are welcome, including those not welcome anywhere else and for good reason. The risk of falling off a slippery catwalk or being swept away in an unpredictable surge of falling water is very real. And it's wretchedly cold as the freezing falls raise clammy mist that seeps through

everything. More ominously, the endless cliff which the falls slowly erode away is riddled with the tunnels of a massive catacomb, filled with the bones of millions from some lost and ancient empire. Not all the dead sleep peacefully, and those who go exploring don't always come back.

But the danger and impermanence lend residents an air of reckless gaiety and instant camaraderie. There's a lively art scene and many bustling markets, and folks here cheerfully check in on their neighbors or take part in all-volunteer service guilds to provide repairs and basic services. After all, you're only here once, and you can't take it with you.

Touchstone: Dangles, a bar with no floor, cantilevered away from the waterfall and suspended over the abyss. Tables and chairs hang from chains, which servers and patrons alike must adroitly swing from. Surely no one would start a fight here.

Opportunities:

- ✿ The Citizen Council: anyone can walk in and be a politician for a day
- ✿ The former occupants of the party's new home left a map of the catacombs
- ✿ Durge the elevator boy: pulls folks up and down all day, knows everyone, sees everything
- ✿ The Misty Lady, seen more and more often on the especially moist bridges, smiling, definitely dead
- ✿ With a deafening clang, a body from somewhere far above crashes onto your catwalk, causing it to partially detach from the cliff face
- ✿ Yesterday should have been Jett Mossweaver's final day. This morning he's still here. A mob is gathering.

The Theoreticallum

Themes: **University, In Decline**
 Terrain: **Antimagic, Cavern Network**
 Abundant: **Knowledge, Patience**
 Scarce: **Magic, Air**
 Remoteness: **Sheltered**
 Currency: **old guilders**

Once a great kingdom, until some forgotten event summoned a sphere of powerful antimagic, souring all spellcasting across the volume. The kingdom failed, leaving only mold-claimed palaces, forgotten villages, and decaying tapestries. All that prospers here now is the college of magical researchers known as the Theoreticallum, founded by eccentric scholars to study the apocalyptic sphere. Though it has become one of the most renowned schools of its kind in the Down, the truth is that after a hundred years the sphere remains as inscrutable as ever—oh. And it's slowly growing.

The college buildings cluster like travelers at a campfire around the Site of incursion. Most are crumbling and repurposed palaces of the old kingdom or hastily assembled extensions. The nearest town is far, far away: it takes a certain kind of masochistic hermit or solipsist to end up here, specialists with no peers to review them and mages who can do no magic. Adding to the solitude, all ways in and out of the volume are sealed off to avoid outside contamination, making the decaying air even stuffier. A recommendation from a scholar of merit, or at least a crate of good wine, is required for entry.

Touchstone: The Site, what everyone calls the cavern in which broods the antimagic sphere itself: pitch-black, impenetrable, the size of a large house. It's surrounded by scientific instruments of all shapes, sizes, and makes, all pointed inwards.

Opportunities:

- ✦ A haggard emeritus claims to have accurately predicted the party's arrival with a steam-sputtering machine, and has three further sealed predictions
- ✦ A little girl is apparently the most revered scholar here
- ✦ The Winding Library, built into a hollowed-out vein of ore
- ✦ A sentient mold worming its way between the buildings offers to infect the least cautious party member to give them "pseudo-magical" powers
- ✦ A persistent young researcher needs uncontaminated blood samples to test a hypothesis
- ✦ A groaning machine sparks and begins to overload; oblivious nearby scientists need to be evacuated



Deepness Bastion

Themes: **Monumental Project, Last Bastion**

Terrain: **Deep Shaft, Ooze**

Abundant: **Drugs, Music**

Scarce: **Magic, Weapons**

Remoteness: **Sheltered**

Currency: **iron rounds**

At the bottom of a mile-wide shaft is a pit of orange and fiery ooze, which legends say is a passage to a plane of infernal fire. Two miles above looms the iron fortress of Deepness Bastion, built long ago to stand eternal guard and defend the Down from whatever might try to crawl forth. But the pit has been silent for many a long century, and the once-noble Knights of the First Line have grown lazy and decadent, whiling away the years with endless entertainments.

The fortress itself thrusts from the wall of the shaft to touch its center, a brooding metal castle bristling with spiky bridges and rarely-trod battlements. On either side are the luxurious cliff houses of the knights and their courtesans, servants, and entertainers, and surrounding these are a network of crude shantytowns, some clinging precarious to the wall, others burrowed inside it. Spiral stairs, tunnelways, and bridges link the sundry structures together, filigreed in fading elegance.

If something ever did emerge from the pit, folk here would be ill-prepared to defend

themselves: the First Line strictly controls all weapons and magic-users entering or leaving the volume. The tales say they're still training behind the walls of their fortress. Let's hope the tales are true.

Touchstone: Coldflung, a huge and ancient defense construct, half scorpion, half tardigrade, clinging to the wall halfway between the fortress and the pit, metal skin green and rusted with age. Legends say it can shoot rays of incalculable cold. It hasn't moved in a century but sometimes telepathically speaks, dim and senescent, to visitors who climb down to it. Who knows what it might remember?

Opportunities:

- ✿ The blind alchemist Termitil will pay good money for close-up paintings and sketches of the fiery ooze
- ✿ Lady Astryus lives in a ruby mansion clinging to the wall like a sparkling limpet; partial to rare delicacies and knows all the powerful people in neighboring volumes
- ✿ Lots of folks here have purple skin. It wasn't always this way. No one will speak of this.
- ✿ Lursa, a short, foul-mouthed thief, knows the exact location of a cache of rare magical weapons inside the Bastion, and claims they're barely guarded
- ✿ A child stumbles from a bridge and falls
- ✿ Someone spots a goblin-sized thing oozing up the walls from the pit. A scout?

The Necrosensorus

Themes: **Unusual Sages, Isolationist**
 Terrain: **Vast Chamber, Massive Pillars**
 Abundant: **Religion, Monsters**
 Scarce: **Trade, Culture**
 Remoteness: **Secret**
 Currency: **Pilgrim's thread**

In a vast dark cavern, countless great stone pillars rise. Atop each is a fire, and gathered round each fire are four gaunt Shapes in black, staring into the flames. Sometimes they answer questions of those who climb the pillars, and when they do, the answers are always true. Shantytowns cluster around the base of the pillars, filled with pilgrims, mystics, tourists, and drifters: but few ever find the courage to make the long climb up.

The shantytowns have no names and no central plan: unmapped streets are cluttered with food vendors, climbing gyms, divination fraudsters, row houses and fleabag hotels, not to mention ramshackle temples of all shapes and sizes (at least six major religions worship the Shapes). Among those who linger here are the Bidders, sad-eyed souls who came to speak to the Shapes but never found the right moment to climb: always waiting for a sign, putting it off to another day. Many sold everything they had to make it here, their futures now as uncertain as their pasts.

Of course, it's hard to blame them. The climb up the pillars is hard, a thousand

feet up crumbling rock with only the edges of time-worn glyphs as handholds. And shadows with huge wings and pinprick red eyes often swoop down from the blackness to pick off climbers and carry them away, or drop them to their deaths. Some say this only happens to those whose time had not yet come to climb. But who can say when the time is right?

Touchstone: The Shapes themselves, gathered around the fires atop the pillars, never looking away from the endlessly burning flames.

Opportunities:

- ♣ The King of Patches, slumlord poet and mapmaker: claims to know a route to the Surface, and will share it with the one who kills the Shape that told him his lover would die
- ♣ Orus the Serimange, giant spider and kingpin: runs a vast criminal network stretching across multiple volumes, dreams of controlling all access to the Shapes
- ♣ There are ruins at the base of some of the pillars, and caverns beneath: some say the origin of the Shapes can be found down there
- ♣ The red-eyed bat-things have been restless lately, even swooping down to kidnap folks from the shantytowns—one desperate mystic's child in particular
- ♣ A wide-eyed child in rags clutches a PC's arm, says she can see when it will be their time to climb.

Worldbuilding

Additional notes on the setting of the Deep, Deep Down: feel free to use as much or little as you like in your campaign.

The Fuzz

A glowing, purple mold, running in rich veins and arteries through the roots of the world, ubiquitous, present to a greater or lesser extent in every volume. Some say it's the root of all food chains and thus the living Down itself. It's certainly true that the cold, dead regions with no Fuzz at all are bereft of light and life.

The Fuzz has several effects:

- Glows with a dim but steady light, even after scraped off
- Edible, if not very tasty
- Causes certain kinds of magic to catastrophically fail, especially teleportation
- If brewed as a tea, creates a telepathic link between its drinkers (see Languages)

The Fuzz's effects on magic vary in particulars from region to region, often in arbitrary-seeming ways that create suspiciously interesting narrative complications. Long-range teleportation, especially, ends more often than not with catastrophic results, making its use almost unheard of.

Attitudes to the Fuzz vary. To some, it's as invisible a resource as the air; others worship it as a living, sentient god. Folk set their clocks by the ebb and flow of its brightness.

At the very least, it makes a good liner for your pack.

Languages

There is no common tongue in the Down.

Language here has taken every form imaginable: speech in a million variants and styles, sign language performed with all manner of limbs, subsonic rumblings, coded flashes of rainbow light, odor sequences, rhythmic dances, even hair-growth patterns (though this makes for a rather slow conversation and one is advised to skip the pleasantries).

Each Folk have at least one language of their own, and probably a great many more. A long-inhabited and populous volume may have developed its own language, generally influenced by the tongues of both its present and ancestral inhabitants. Travelers, traders, merchants and nobles often know some dialect or other of the Grim Speech, the Undertongue, the Lingua Motivia or the guttural Gab Gab, but most of the general populace do not, and none of these are ubiquitous. Criminal types, entertainers,

servants of evil, and religious faithful each have their own argot or patois. The languages of love, of course, are reasonably universal but not generally applicable outside their very specific domain.

Given all this, the odds that two random inhabitants of the Down speak a common tongue are slim. Fortunately, the Fuzz once again proves useful: those who share a pot of tea brewed from the stuff develop a limited shared telepathy that allows them to understand each other's speech until the effects fade, generally after a day or so. Tea-sharing is therefore an incredibly common greeting ritual, like a slower, tastier handshake. Get used to drinking the stuff: most non-combat encounters will begin with a ritualistic pouring. The language-comprehension effects can be mentally directed and toggled at will, allowing for slipping back into one's own tongue to speak privately (though this is considered rude if teacups aren't yet empty).

Languages can also be learned the old-fashioned way. Learning to speak a handful or two is a popular way for folk with leisure time to pass it. There are fungi and drugs available to accelerate this process, and no lack of willing instructors seeking employment.

Sometimes, regrettably, there's no time for a language lesson or even a cup of tea. Bartering is often accomplished with an elaborate system of frantic gestures, good for discussing prices, quality of wares, or how offended one is by either; but little else. Lack of a common tongue might explain why so many encounters in the wilds lead to bloodshed (although surface folk seem to need no such excuse). Travelers often find simple actions like pointing, rubbing one's belly, or terrified screaming may provide all the communication that's necessary for discussing nearby points of interest.

Currency

The Deep, Deep Down also has no standard currency, and indeed it's rare for even adjacent volumes to share the same coinage. Still have any of those gold pieces from the surface? No one down here's ever seen one, nor do they think very highly of gold in general, which runs in crumbly mustard-brown veins weakening foundations: a nuisance mineral. Currencies here come in as bewildering a variety of forms as do languages: glimmering threads, gem-carved buttons, serpent's feathers, pennies of glass, banknotes stamped by the local monarch, lines of credit invisibly tracked by local banker-ghosts, and anything else you can imagine.

Moneychangers are common in heavily-traveled volumes, with currencies from all corners jangling in a bewildering array of hanging ropes and mirrored drawers. Such services, of course, take a hefty cut of each transaction.

Drugs and fungi come closest to a universal currency, with reasonably consistent value across the Down. Gems are precious in some places, but paving stones in others. Art is even more subjective, though it's hard to put an upper cap on how much the right buyer might pay for the right piece. A volume's scarcities, of course, will attract premium payment, while its abundancies will be hard or impossible to sell locally. Useful goods like weapons can often be sold for local lucre in a pinch, and stories of brave deeds and far-off lands are always in demand. Generally, though, one's best bet when arriving in a new volume is to find someone hiring heroes and paying in the local scrip.

Table of Random Currencies

» Roll **4d6** and read from top to bottom: first pair is Adjective, second pair is Unit.

	Adjective		Unit
1-1	emerald	1-1	buttons
1-2	silver	1-2	chimes
1-3	sea	1-3	pearls
1-4	sovereign's	1-4	thread
1-5	imperial	1-5	prisms
1-6	god	1-6	shells
2-1	serpent	2-1	buckles
2-2	bronze	2-2	seeds
2-3	weighted	2-3	pennies
2-4	general's	2-4	cubits
2-5	invisible	2-5	marbles
2-6	painted	2-6	feathers
3-1	haunted	3-1	ducats
3-2	ruby	3-2	obols
3-3	crystal	3-3	shards
3-4	demon	3-4	coins
3-5	titan	3-5	florins
3-6	powdered	3-6	ingots
4-1	glimmer	4-1	stones
4-2	clay	4-2	shillings
4-3	amber	4-3	sheaves
4-4	azure	4-4	farthings
4-5	pewter	4-5	salts
4-6	jade	4-6	shekels
5-1	fire	5-1	beads
5-2	obsidian	5-2	songs
5-3	blood	5-3	ribbons
5-4	void	5-4	dust
5-5	living	5-5	guilders
5-6	secret	5-6	rounds
6-1	peasant	6-1	thummins
6-2	hollow	6-2	promises
6-3	rune	6-3	pebbles
6-4	pledge	6-4	scrip
6-5	elder	6-5	bells
6-6	certified	6-6	dice



Directions and Orientation

Surface compasses won't work in the Down. The six cardinal directions here are up and down (the axis of gravity), faezward and murkwise (toward or away from the brightest local cluster of Fuzz), and dextral and sinister (to the right and left of faezward). All well and good except two of those three are relative or subjective, hinging especially on one's interpretation of words like "brightest" and "local." This can lead to unhelpful directions from locals like "Oh, just go upwise and sharp sinister past the palace, then head true faezward, you can't miss it. What? No, not Lord Utter's faezward, are you daft? Use the Shestal's faezward, of course." (And this is *after* drinking the tea.)

Despite centuries of attempts by the Flinj with lodestones, the Kestei with phlogistonical alembics, and the Serimange with vibrating ley lines, no universal

system of coordinates, directions, or mapping for the Down has ever emerged. Large-scale maps simply do not exist, and even regional ones are hard to come by and prone to getting outdated. Routes between volumes are constantly collapsing or being re-dug, altered by isolationists or trade monopolists, or melted away by an upswell of magma or magical catastrophe. Some claim the very rock is less solid than it seems, flowing and shifting in silent, unknowable currents, making any attempt to permanently fix points of the Down relative to each other an utter impossibility. The Flinj, the Kestei, and the Serimange all vehemently deny this theory, especially in their grant proposals.

If some reliable method were found to navigate between volumes or make better maps, it would of course have immense potential value, and certainly no forces in the Down would have incentives to destroy, sabotage, steal, hoard, or denounce it.

Legends of the Surface

Few will credit claims that the party is from the Surface, nor that such a place even exists, though most have at least heard the term. Hazy legends sing of an impossibly distant land “where the rock stops,” even if most folk don’t really get what that means. At best they might interpret your wild stories of an outside with a moon and sun as describing a very large cavern with huge glowing marbles rolling across its top. The strange appearance of player characters provides no evidence either, as the Down is chock-full of curious folk, many almost as queer and misshapen as the PCs themselves.

Somewhat more familiar are standard subterranean folk (dwarves, dark elves, and so on) who many believe in and some might even claim to have met. These peoples are generally thought to come from a place far above full of strange creatures and customs. Any such folk encountered will be just as lost and cut-off from their homes as the players. If they do know secret ways up, they’ll be as protective of them as surface traders of their spice routes.

“Day” and “Night”

The Fuzz glows in a strange rhythm. It lightens and darkens in a cycle that roughly approximates the terrestrial cadence of day and night, and is used in a similar way to mark the passage of time. But it’s been known to act strangely at certain times or places, bringing darkness for a month or a purple dawn every fifteen minutes. In volumes where such irregularity is frequent, folk have adopted

different strategies for dealing with it: an unscheduled long night might signal a lawless free-for-all in some places, while in others it’s a time of reflection or religious devotion.

In rare volumes, the Fuzz stays in a perpetual blaze of purple light, or eternally dim or even dark. Inhabitants of such places find new rhythms to mark the passage of time. Locals may not need sleep (or do it differently), or might use the regular tempo of steam vents, the ebb and flow of magma currents, or the hatching of scrabbling insect broods as their temporal heartbeats.

In practice you’ll find it very hard to avoid using (and having your NPCs use) familiar and ingrained terms like *daybreak*, *tonight*, or *noon*: you probably won’t even notice you’re doing it. If you really want to go for your Worldbuilding merit badge, you can try using these terms instead:

day	gleam
night	murk
today	this gleam
tonight	this murk
tomorrow	next gleam
tomorrow night	next murk
yesterday	a’foregleam
last night	a’foremurk
morning	gloaming
noon	midbright
afternoon	afterbright
evening	darkling
midnight	murkest

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Recommended readings:

Role-playing books: Dungeon World; The Perilous Wilds; Veins of the Earth; Wormskin (*periodical*); Stars Without Number; Masks: 1,000 Memorable

NPCs for Any Roleplaying Game; The Undercroft (*zine*); Return of the Lazy Dungeon Master; Underdark (*4th ed D&D supplement*); Necropraxis Productions Hazard System

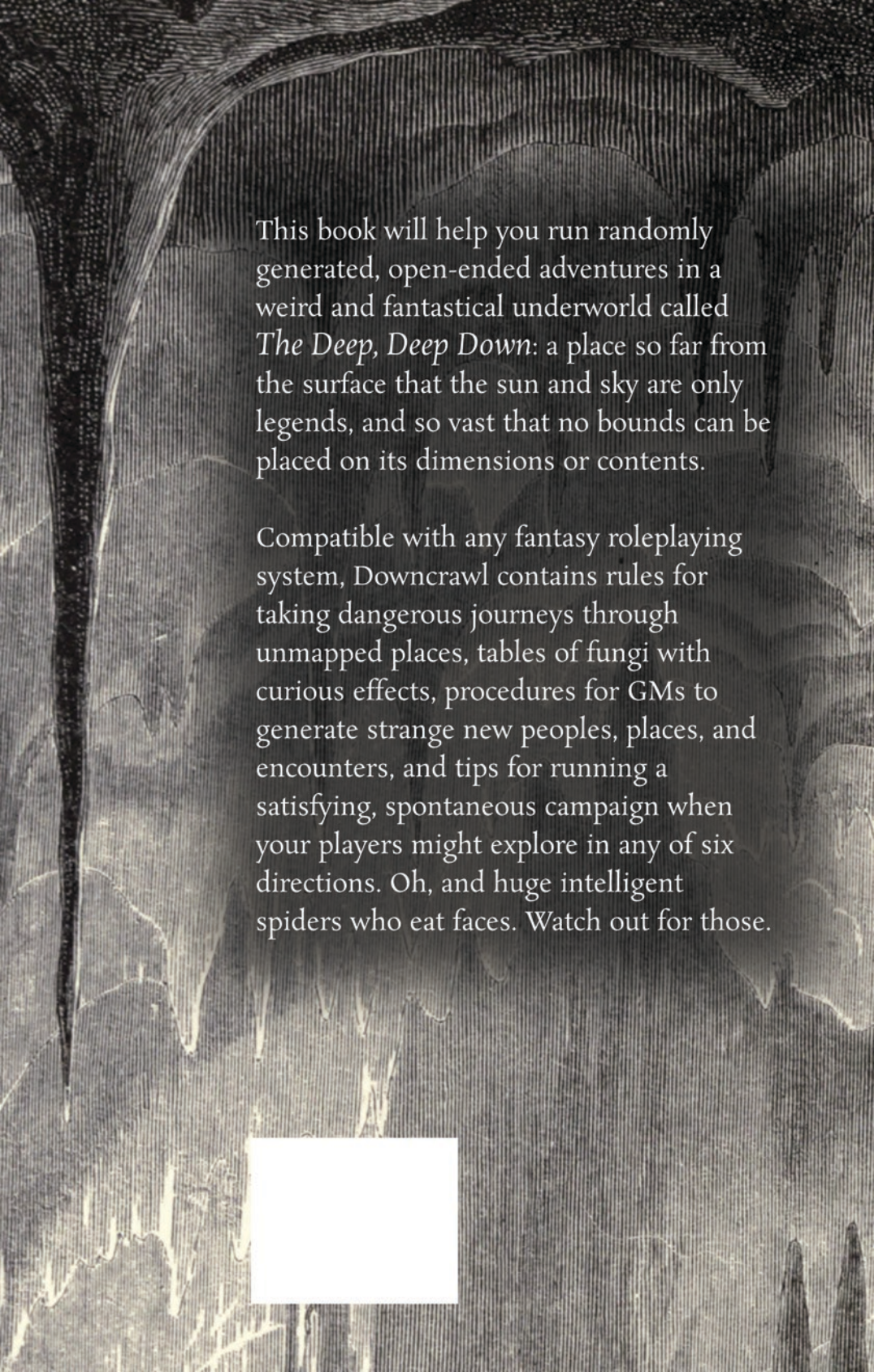
Books: Alice in Wonderland; Perdido Street Station; Mythago Woods; Journey to the Center of the Earth; Imajica; The Longest Cave

Artists: Remedios Varo; Zdzisław Beksiński; Wayne Barlowe

Digital games: Fallen London; Uru; Kentucky Route Zero; Hunter, In Darkness

Podcasts: Welcome to Nightvale





This book will help you run randomly generated, open-ended adventures in a weird and fantastical underworld called *The Deep, Deep Down*: a place so far from the surface that the sun and sky are only legends, and so vast that no bounds can be placed on its dimensions or contents.

Compatible with any fantasy roleplaying system, Downcrawl contains rules for taking dangerous journeys through unmapped places, tables of fungi with curious effects, procedures for GMs to generate strange new peoples, places, and encounters, and tips for running a satisfying, spontaneous campaign when your players might explore in any of six directions. Oh, and huge intelligent spiders who eat faces. Watch out for those.